THE BOSTON-CURRY PARTY

on the 'sacked, plundered and smoking Australian educational battlefield'

at

Goroke

Fredrick Toben

PEACE BOOKS
1998

THE MEDIOCRE TEACHER TELLS
THE GOOD TEACHER EXPLAINS
THE SUPERIOR TEACHER DEMONSTRATES
THE GREAT TEACHER INSPIRES

Australians today, made uneasy by shallow rubbishing of our real history, might reassure themselves by reflecting on the European roots and the classical continuity of almost everything we have - our language, our laws, our learning and our liberty. Fine as spiderwebs, these subtleties elude the intellectual grasp of vulgar minds. But they are there, and they are strong.

Anon

'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to which our wills are gardeners; so that if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set byssop and weed up tine, supply it with one gender of herbs or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness or manur'd with industry - why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills.

Othello

CONTENTS

PROLOGUE----------**4**

BOOK ONE - ARRIVAL AND CONFLICT

CHAPTER ONE - GETTING TO KNOW YOU----------8
TWO.- PECKING ORDERS----------16
THREE - EASTER CELEBRATIONS----------21
FOUR - WORK ETHOS----------25
FIVE - THE IN-SERVICE----------32
SIX - THE LIE----------39
SEVEN - FIRST BLAST----------43

BOOK TWO - PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY

EIGHT - SHAKESPEARE'S COMPETENCE----------49
NINE - EARLY RETIREMENT----------53
TEN - SEE THE BOSS----------58
ELEVEN - SHAKESPEARE CONTINUES----------68
TWELVE - CONSENSUS AND OPEN COMMUNICATIONS---71

BOOK THREE - PEACE AND CONSENSUS AMIDST WAR

THIRTEEN - GENERAL PROBLEMS----------82
FOURTEEN - CANOEING----------86
FIFTEEN - UNWINDING TERM II----------88
SIXTEEN - NO PERMANENCY----------92
SEVENTEEN - MORE DEMOTIONS----------95
EIGHTEEN - SECOND REFERENCE----------98

BOOK FOUR - HELP SUPPORT THE EXECUTION

NINETEEN - THE NEW SCHOOL COMPLEX----------100
TWENTY - WE'VE HAD PROBLEMS----------106
TWENTY-ONE - SERIOUS CONTRADICTIONS----------110
TWENTY-TWO - HELP IS OFFERED----------113
TWENTY-THREE - OFFICIAL COMPLAINT CONFIRMED---117
TWENTY-FOUR - TRANSFER OR ENQUIRY----------137

BOOK FIVE - PROFESSIONAL DEATH SENTENCE

TWENTY-FIVE - STUDENT AGREEMENT----------154
TWENTY-SIX - FOLLOW ME----------163
TWENTY-SEVEN - A WEEK IN NOVEMBER----------167
TWENTY-EIGHT - LETTERS, LETTERS, LETTERS----------174
TWENTY-NINE - MORE LETTERS----------178
THIRTY - THE NEED FOR FLOWERS----------182

EPILOGUE

THIRTY-ONE - PARENTS' SURVEY----------216
THIRTY-TWO - CENTENARY OF EDUCATION 1985--------218
THIRTY-THREE - PROCESS WRITING - ----------227
THIRTY-FOUR - PAST EXPERIENCE: St Arnaud & Kings Park….232
THIRTY-FIVE - RETIREMENT: TRANSFER - DISMISSAL------242
THIRTY-SIX - MORAL AND INTELLECTUAL COURAGE AMID DECEIT AND COWARDICE…….254

AFTERWARD
Ronald Conway, O.A.M., B.A., M.Ed., M.A.P.S……..276

PROLOGUE

When the air is hot and dry, mirages teasingly dissolve the bluish-black asphalt surface of the Horsham-Goroke road into a restless, flickering sea. As the bitumen melts under the merciless midday sun, there emerges from the flatness of the Wimmera Plains a monolith - Mount Arapiles.

Mount Arapiles, this ancient protruding mount prophetically heralded the construction of countless grain silos which further break up the seemingly monotonous countryside. The not-so-famous rocky outcrop just next to Mount Arapiles reflects the spirit of the local people. Mitre Rock is indeed a striking likeness of a bishop's hat. The name is thus a symbol of the spirit of the people who live on these plains. They are hardworking, pious and mostly of Germanic stock.

Mount Arapiles and Mitre Rock, though unequal siblings, host a diverse group of enthusiastic climbers. There are the dedicated mountaineers, one of whom, Jon Muir, received an OA for his 1988 Everest climb. He now lives with his wife, Bridget, in Natimuk, who herself in 1997 was likewise awarded the OA for her There are the army recruits who challenge themselves as they scale some of the more demanding vertical walls. There are also the climbers who come from all over the world on pilgrimage to Mount Arapiles - from Europe, America, Japan. Why do they do this, why do they risk life and limb? Some say this activity is character building. It strengthens mind and body. Sadly, over the past few years a handful of these dedicated and experienced men and women - who make up this closely-knit international fraternity - slipped and fell for the last time from Mount Arapiles.

Mass tourism has not yet engulfed the mountain. These stony relics of bygone times are not to be confused with the obscenely painted Sisters Rocks, situated on the Western Highway, near Stawell. Here the multitudes rest before continuing their journey to Adelaide. And while they rest, they eat and drink and aim their spray cans at the rocks, there to create in an instant lots of graffiti. Like an animal marking its territory, these tourists leave behind their names painfully emblazoned in many-layered coats of paint.

It is almost an act of desperation. No-one knows whether upon their return from Adelaide, their names will still be visible or covered by others. The only hope of immortality is that quick snapshot which proves that it was all real.

Mount Arapiles and Mitre rock remain pristine and far away from the pampered tourist's itinerary. The spray-painting mentality which mutilates the Sisters Rocks has avoided them because they remain a hard target.

Only 40 kilometres west of Arapiles there lies the small country town of Goroke. The name derives from an Aboriginal word for magpie. Here, in this sleepy retirement village of about 300 people, there occurred at the local school something quite extraordinary. During 1983 the primary principal, Raymond McCraw, discovered that his secondary English teacher, Fredrick Toben, was quite incompetent. During 1984 the principal used the infamous union agreement's procedures to prove his case. A few days after the Orwellian year of 1984 had closed, I was, indeed, found guilty and dismissed from the Victorian state teaching service. The reasons given were that I was incompetent and that I had been disobedient. This act, which culminated in destroying my family and my career, was perpetrated by a pack of savages who dared call themselves professional educators.

50 kilometres south-west of Goroke lies the township of Edenhope, the administrative centre of the Shire of Kowree. It was here that in 1962 I matriculated from the Edenhope High School, known today as the Edenhope P-12 College.

In the following year, I, a farmer's son, had the fortune to attend the University of Melbourne's English, German and Philosophy departments. Here professors Maxwell, Samuel and Boyce-Gibson represented, for me at least, the epitome of scholarship. Learning may be embodied in the objectivity of a disembodied system but it is represented and brought alive by individuals who reflect a definite set of values - a specific mind-set which, in turn, reflects a definite world-view.

The prevailing 1960s world-view was crudely characterised by the East-West, Capitalism-Communism ideological divide. This dichotomy relied upon a common enemy to keep the super-powers at one another's throats. The spectre of re-emerging Nazism - only recently so soundly defeated - always diffused potential East-West confrontation.

I could not warm to radical student politics. There was pure Marxism, Marxism-Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism. It always bothered me to find highly intelligent people embracing such ideologies. The fact that they clearly aimed to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat made me wary. How could anyone support the establishment of a dictatorship?

That's why I preferred to join the university's Liberal Club where David Kemp tried to imbue us with a core of solid democratic, personal values. Similarly, Lauchlan Chipman and the rationalists tried to stimulate our thinking processes. Lunch-time meetings were not there to push a political ideology but rather to question our very existence. There was no officially sanctioned hate object, as was the case with Marxism. One view was driven by hatred and envy while the other encouraged personal development and self-reflection.

I missed out on the Vietnam draft but felt I had to do something to broaden my mind. And what better way than to travel overseas? In 1967 I travelled to New Zealand, there to continue my studies and to begin my teaching career.

After three years I decided to continue my travels, left New Zealand and crossed via America and Canada to Europe. There, during a sojourn of six years, I managed to study at first hand various political, social and educational systems. Naturally I trekked to the to the various cultural shrines which had been a part of my studies. This included meeting a number of Europe's outstanding intellectuals. Their ordinariness sobered me while their enterprise stimulated me into believing that I, too, had something to contribute to society's well-being. My return home was delayed by a three-year look at how Rhodesia was transformed into Zimbabwe. Also in Rhodesia something wonderful happened - I fell in love with a lovely lady, a young nurse - Georgina Mary. She responded, and together we returned to Australia.

When, in July 1980, I was appointed to Leongatha High School, I was happy. There was so much work to be done in the classrooms. The State school system had suffered a marked image problem. The teaching of English had been diluted to the point where the subject had become a part of a mish-mash called Social Science. This subject blended English with history and geography - and the prevailing ideology decried the importance of basic language work. Spelling didn't really matter and "dyslexia" was the buzz word.

My transfer to Kings Park High School exposed me to a principal who delighted in cultural matters. But he failed to put a brake on this pursuit and celebrated hedonism. Ten years later the school had literally succumbed to this doctrine and fell apart. The principal's lofty cultural aspirations were revealed to be a sham, an intellectual fraud.

My six months at St Arnaud High School seemed too much for the principal there, Mr Peter Schmidt. He was a descendant of one of those many 1850s German immigrants who took refuge from religious

persecution by coming to Australia. He had the misfortune of a split political belief-system whereby he delighted in celebrating his own private school days while at the same time working for the Labor Party. More of that later.

I welcomed my 1983 appointment to the Goroke Consolidated School. It was just 50 kilometres from Edenhope, from home - an ideal time and place to settle down, to do my duty to teach and raise a family. What better place for all this than a small farming community, where the family is known, where parents and twin-brother are farming, where individuals matter - where there is no escape, no anonymity. It was all so ideal - a teacher with his young wife and baby son, ready to serve the local community.

I did not expect to find within the education system people who would soon do me great harm, who - because of their own personal jealousies and hatreds - would lie, deceive, cheat and generally discredit the teaching profession.

There was the president of the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association, Brian Henderson. There was senior staffing officer, Steve Macpherson, who co-authored the infamous Three Union Agreement which was used in conjunction with the Teaching Service Act to have me dismissed from the service. There was also the Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations, Jim Betson, whose appointment heralded the turn in Victorian education. His predecessor, John Collins, my former headmaster at Edenhope, would never have co-operated with the unions as Betson did. The last Director-General of Education was The Reverend Dr Norman Curry. He made the dismissal decision just ten months before he himself was removed from office. The D-G's position was re-named Chief-Executive and Dr Graham Allen's appointment saw a Marxist head the State teaching service.

Finally, there was the 400-strong Goroke community which cherished its 100-year education tradition.

Before and after the second world war, there were scores of one-teacher primary schools dotted all over the countryside. During the 1950s it was policy to rationalise educational resources - and so was born the consolidation principle, from which emerged Goroke Consolidated School.

I, too, intended to consolidate my life here. My wife, Georgina, our son, Karl, and I moved into our rather neglected school-house with relish. We aimed to make this our family home. Directly across from the school was the Goroke Community Health Centre where my wife joined the nursing team on a part-time basis. In this way she supplemented our income and managed to keep in touch with developments in her profession.

I was to learn that some teachers, often animated by the principal's own talk, bitterly complained about individual members of this farming community. I didn't. I was too happy to be back in home territory. In any case, I had so much work to do at school. I could not afford the luxury of being negative towards a community whose members made it possible for me to work productively.

BOOK ONE - ARRIVAL AND CONFLICT
CHAPTER ONE GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Any seasoned teacher would have known that it was obligatory to attend the principal's welcoming barbecue. When Raymond McCraw extended an invitation to his staff at morning recess, his words were received with warmth and enthusiasm. Muffled cries of "Hope you've got enough booze" briefly surfaced above the hubbub. No sooner had Ray left the staffroom, though, than odd murmurs began to decry the invitation. "He only wants to find out personal things about you - he'll just be fishing," Mark Weegberg muttered. I'd spent too much time in staffrooms to be taken in by such noise but I was certainly surprised later to see Mark helping the principal set up the barbecue.

Georgina and I occupied the second in a row of four Housing Commission homes reserved for teachers in Church Street. They were small functional houses and only five years later they were to receive a much-needed overhaul. This included the installation of air conditioners, something I always wondered about. Was it necessary to have air conditioning in a climate where it was needed for only two weeks of the year, at most?

The principal's house was set on a double block, on the corner of Church and Station street. Both these street names reveal the practicality with which the town planners had approached their task. In Church Street you could find five churches - Wesleyan-Methodist (which had become the Uniting Church), Anglican, Catholic and Lutheran. Some symbolists pointed out the significance of Church Streets' east-west orientation. Station Street pointed in the opposite direction. To the north it formed a T-junction with Main Street, Goroke's shopping centre. To the south it led past the railway station to the Karnak-Edenhope Road.

The railway station has now been dismantled and the last time a wheat train thundered through Goroke was in this very year, 1983. I remember how delighted our son Karl was when I lifted him into the diesel monster's driving cabin. The train never made it back to Horsham. Just on the other side of Natimuk the railway line spread-eagled beneath the weight of the heavy load, derailing a dozen wagons. It took a couple of days to remove the mess and the authorities never sent another train to Goroke. The freight burden was transferred to the road system. Broken surfaces apparently didn't cause as much damage to the economy as did a non-profitable rail system. At least, that is what the Wimmera people were told They had no choice but to accept the loss of their rail link.

My wife didn't really wish to attend the barbecue. Our son was just two years old and she preferred to spend the time with him. "I don't like this drinking", she said as the noise from the principal's back yard wafted across to our place. "Just make an appearance, then take off with Karl."

I said. "Ray'll understand. He's got a seven-year-old daughter." And so the three of us walked along the brown nature strip, then turned left into Ray's backyard.

There was no shrimp on the barbie, but Ray was busily turning over the sausages. "Beef or pork, we provide both", he called out to everyone. Ray always wore his Advance Australia jumper. It turned him into an almost round 1.65 metre fluffy ball. Add to this his habit of trying to sound like Bob Hawke and here was a man who looked and behaved like a larrikin. His beard effectively hid the contours of his face. It gave him a protective mask. He always greeted you with enthusiasm, with a word of concern for your personal well-being. Sometimes I felt he must have read too many of those popular American motivational journals. He had a high-pitched, staccato laugh.

Young and inexperienced teachers who came to him with their problems were warmly embraced. "Don't worry about that. Keep me informed. It'll be OK Just trust me." And those who didn't need his

help were challenged outright. “I’m running this school and it’s got to go my way. I’m not interested in you discussing away the problem.” That would end any further discussion. There was nothing more to say. He had had such a lot of experience - 25 years of it in primary schools. Never mind that Goroke had a primary section of 100 students and a secondary section of 50 students.

Ray didn’t let it become general knowledge that before coming to Goroke the only senior administrative role he had held was at Timboon Consolidated School. There, for one term during 1981, he had become acting vice-principal. Then when the principal, Sid Morgan, advertised this job as a permanent position, Ray McCraw’s application was not accepted. Why not?

Because, I was told, McCraw “is a back-stabbing bastard. He couldn’t even organise the school newsletter without shitting on you. The man’s got no standards.” The following year the Department of Education Staffing section appointed McCraw to Goroke.

By this time Staffing in Melbourne had become saturated with former union members, and the maxim “no ticket, no job” became entrenched within the bureaucracy then located at Nauru House. Before the Rialto opened there were already educational upstarts who longed to occupy one of the new offices that offered such a wonderful view of Melbourne. One wonders whether they did anything else but congratulate themselves for having literally made it to the top of this $2 billion bureaucracy.

When John Collins retired as staffing officer, the position of Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations was created and filled by Jim Betson. His appointment created consternation among the old guard. There was one particular 60 year-old Geelong educator who couldn’t talk about it for fear it would induce another heart attack. When I indicated that I would still like to know what was wrong with Betson, he waked away from me, with one hand clutching his heart while the other mopped his brow with a handkerchief.

Jim Betson had a good teaching record. He had been an Inspector before his union abolished the office. He’d come up through the ranks and he certainly presented himself well. What was wrong with him, then? His appointment was a political move. From now on senior positions would be filled by card-carrying Labor Party members. And so began the illness which afflicts all bureaucracies when the unholy amalgam of incompetence and malevolence dictates policies and standards. Betson had a buddy called Steve Macpherson. He was a boyish-faced man with premature grey hair. These two worked hand-in-hand with the teachers’ unions, specifically the Vicorian Secondary Teachers Association, headed by Brian Henderson and Peter Ford.

During 1983 they had together nutted out an Agreement which, in time, aimed to replace the focus of the Teaching Service Act. The proposed aim was to make the Ministry of Education more teacher friendly, so that disputes would be settled by arbitration rather than be encroached on by the force of law. That this Agreement was never registered with the Industrial Relations commission surprised only those who ran foul of it. After all, the authors knew full well that by promoting this sham-Agreement to believing teachers anything could be achieved as far as staffing matters were concerned. When the Agreement failed to achieve its desired results, there was always the Teaching Service Act to fall back on.

The rank and file members of the teachers’ unions were not aware of this gigantic confidence trick. However, deception and lying cannot sustain relationships too long. Without truth-telling we cannot have trust and without trust relationships break down and our social fabric begins to rot. So, the Agreement would only work effectively with people of good character and of good will - and that was not the case in the Rialto Towers. The dictum that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely is relevant here. It is wrong. Power doesn’t corrupt. Power merely highlights the character of

those who have attained it. Similarly with the good-faith document called the Union Agreement. It, too, did not corrupt the people who administers it. When rotten people apply anything, it is not surprising to find that the result is damaging, unfair or unjust.

It was a Judge of the Supreme Court who said that honourable people honour their agreement. Well, there was a scarcity of honourable people when it came to honour the Agreement in my case. Ironically, those who uphold honour are also courageous people. Truth-telling is a courageous act because all too often we do not wish to hurt someone's feelings. We begin with minor lies in order to protect others from harsh realities.

Such moral problems did not bother Ray McCraw, my new principal.

The evening air was warm enough for mosquitoes to thrive. The atmosphere was pleasantly relaxed. My wife had already done her social bit and she was back home putting our little fellow to bed.

"And what made you come to this dropped-out place?" Ray asked me in a mocking tone.

"What? I applied for this school. Staffing was about to send me from St Arnaud High to Charlton when they told me that there was a permanent English position available at Goroke."

"You must be mad coming here, with your qualifications," chipped in Mrs Anna McCraw.

"Not at all," I responded firmly. "You must remember that I'm from the country. My parents and brother farm just 50 kilometres from here, in Edenhope where I finished my schooling."

Both Ray and Anna looked at each other with bemusement.

I continued, "Anyway, Mr Turner, of Staffing, was pleased to send me here because the teacher they'd sent out before had taken one look at the place, then fled back to Melbourne's bright lights.

"Were you born in this district, Fredrick?" Ray asked.

"No, I was born in Jade, in Northern Germany."

At hearing this Ray visibly twitched and rose from his garden chair. "You don't speak like a German. I thought you were born in Australia."

"No, Ray, I was ten when I came out. I had some very good English teachers - and some hard work on my part. But I am an Australian citizen."

"That's good, that's good," he muttered half audibly. "I was born in Australia but I'm a Brit - and I hate Germans. They started it all, they're cruel and murderous…."

His voice faded and his countenance was fierce with raw hatred. Then bushy-haired and bearded Mark Weegberg snapped sarcastically at me, "I know your type. I've got a friend with a PhD. I know your type. Big fish in a little pond, that's all you are."

Innocently I asked him, "What do you mean, Mark?"

But Mark's attention had wandered back to the object he held in his hand, and in a breathless frenzy he began to assault the stubby. I could see him joyously sucking on the bottle and I felt I should make a further clarification to him.

"Yes," I said quite unashamedly. "I've seen the world and I've come back home to settle down with a young wife and child. I'm quite happy with my lot. I don't want any more at the moment. Perhaps I can also get a bit of job satisfaction by inspiring the kids at school with a bit of our literary heritage."

Plucking at his whiskers the principal sat down and began to rock a little in his chair. "You're wasting your time with this bunch of kids," he sneered. "Just look at their parents. That disqualifies most of them from effective and purposeful learning. The problem with this town is that it's made up of two classes of people - them and us. There is the rich class and there is the poor rabble."

Weegberg's eyes lit up at the mentioning of class. He began to flail his arms about. "It's getting hot," he muttered to himself. Then he turned on McCraw and breathlessly gushed forth, "That's why we must retain strong union membership among our staff at school. This Wimmera area is a National Party stronghold and we must break their influence. We've got to start with the kids at school. I'll see to it that Labor's voice is heard at school. Unionism is my life. If you look at our education system, then it's quite clear that militant unionism has succeeded in getting rid of a lot of rubbish. Had it not been for the unions we would still have the Inspectorate - those bastards who could promote or demote you at will. Had it not been for the unions we would still be offering our kids an upper-class education, and that's madness. Now we have equality of outcome policies to make sure that our kids get what is best for them - what they want to learn."

Bruce and Sue Heggie, the middle-aged couple, had been sitting together all evening. Mark's outburst visibly shook them both. Bruce had been in the teaching service for only a couple of years. He was a casualty from the private sector and now looked towards some permanent security as a trades teacher. The industrial market-place had taken its toll on his nerves. He had been appalled at how ruthless free enterprise could become - where the boss could hire and fire at will, where the qualities of compassion and mercy didn't exist. Matronly Sue had three children, and although she was not on the staff, she regularly spent time in the staffroom, always there to smile at the right time, there to listen to and comfort anyone who felt uneasy in this small country town.

"We've been here for two years now," she said, looking in Mark's direction. "Bruce and I have found most of the kids are quite good. You've had good results in woodwork and metalwork, haven't you darling?"

"Yeah," Bruce mumbled in his slow, calm fashion. "Yeah, the kids here are OK. They're good."

"But," interjected Ray, "the kids at school are unnaturally vicious to each other. Just watch them at play."

Sue added: "Children will be unruly and nasty at times." Having raised three children herself, Sue did not share this negative point-of-view. She bluntly expressed her opinion but then did not labour the point.

Throughout this general conversation Karen Reid, the new science teacher, interspersed each snippet of conversation with a deep-throated nervous twitter. She was a somewhat oversized, full-lipped and seemingly cheerful woman. She agreed with everything that was being said, and more. I was to learn that she would agree with contradictions. She would attempt to continue snippets of conversation by

fabricating stories. Her imagination was boundless. She had been everywhere, had done everything and knew all there was to know about life. You name it and Karen Reid would pontificate upon it.

As the evening progressed, McCraw became visibly irritated with Karen's manner, and finally he could not contain himself any longer.

"So, you've got a black friend in Africa. What's the number of his tree-house?" he laughed. To his surprise Karen took this as a cue, an invitation to continue with her autobiography.

"Well, when I was in Kenya, I saw tree huts. They look quite comfortable too. Some of the girls I taught actually told me how they preferred to live in tree huts. It was the only effective way to ward off potential rapists."

At this point Goroke's maths teacher of one year's experience tried to save the conversation from slipping past his stubby. More to the point, he wished to help Ray retain control of the conversation flow.

"Well, this place isn't too far off from Africa. The streets may have been named but the houses haven't as yet been numbered," he said, lovingly fondling his close-cropped greying beard. There was an awkward pause - but not for Karen. She seized the moment and launched into a monologue about the properties of a nonagon. Not only was she a scientist but she was also a mathematician and a computer programmer. Robert didn't like anyone encroaching into his self-appointed sphere of expertise.

I couldn't contain myself any longer and interrupted Karen's gush. "Karen, let's get to basics and define a few terms here. Nonus is Latin for ninth and gonia is Greek for angle. Surely, when we anglicise this compound, then we get no-go out of it."

"That's right," she cheerfully replied. "I'd heard about this new word when I was in Africa, or was it a little before that? It could have been during the 50s, during the Mau Mau uprising when a lot of no-go areas were set up in Kenya."

Anna McCraw had become visibly upset. She had watched her husband's unsuccessful attempt to retain control of the conversation. Now it had degenerated into Babylonian babble. Up to this point she had sat nonchalantly in her deck chair, advertising her full-bosomed, long-legged torso. Mark had been gazing at her all night. Anna absorbed his energy without batting an eyelid of encouragement. Even her gaze gave nothing away. But he was rapt, and he cradled his stubby with more than an anticipation of a quick refill. In his own mind, Mark had already consummated his dream a dozen times over. With each additional stubby the virtues of unionism faded from his lips. Instead, he began to reminisce, to talk about his personal past experiences - thereby advertising his present needs.

"A friend of mine at Wendouree High-Tech, in Ballarat, is a lesbian," he began excitedly. "We'd been teaching together for a long time before I found out about her sexual preference. I admired that woman because she had the courage to take her lover to a staff social. That takes guts, don't you think? Some of the older, stuffier teachers didn't like it. Anyway, marriage is out for teachers. Did you know that the divorce rate among teachers is the highest among the professions?"

"I don't know, Mark," Anna responded. "Ray and I have been married for fourteen years and I don't think we're going to quit, are we, Ray?"
Ray did not immediately respond, and Mark again took the initiative.

"That may well be the case for you. I'm speaking statistically and generally, Anna."

“But Mark,” Anna said impatiently, “as a commerce teacher you should know there are liars, bloody liars and statisticians. Admittedly,” she added jestingly, “as a commerce teacher you would know a lot about congress, er consumerism.”

Such frankness disarmed him. He’d been caught napping and Anna had made full use of the situation. Mark became restless, he rose from his chair and snapped, “I’m still hungry. Aren’t there any sausages and chops left. Hey, Robert! What’ve you got left in the fridge next door?”

Robert lived alone in the house next to ours, next to the McCraws’. When a new aluminium fence was erected between his and Ray’s house, both of them made certain that the fence had a door which would give them access to each other’s back yards. Mark was already at that door, waiting for Robert to come and lead him into the house, when Robert called out, “Sorry, Mark, the fridge is empty till pay-day. I’ve got nothing left. It’s all here, or was here.”

And so Mark began to bluster about the barbecue area, prodding a dying fire and lifting empty beer bottles into the air. “Well,” he tried to sound cheerful, “we’ve even run out of beer. Looks as if I have to switch over to wine.” He continued to rummage through the evening’s cartons until he finally found a wine cask. “Hey, you guys, there’s still some left,” he shouted joyously. “Any other takers?”

Without waiting for a response, he filled his own glass, then turned to Glenn Duncan, the new art teacher at the school. Last year Glenn’s predecessor had disappeared overnight from the school. The rumour about his being involved in drug-taking had reached the authorities and parents had approached the police about it. The teacher was given an ultimatum - either transfer out immediately or face criminal charges. No wonder he left Goroke in a great hurry. Glenn was different. “What are you drinking, Glenn, my boy?” Mark asked condescendingly.

“Oh, I’m on orange-juice right now,” he replied hesitantly, not quite sure whether Mark would be insulted by his preference for non-alcoholic drinks.

“Get some wine into you,” Mark urged him. “It’ll make you feel good. I’m a beer drinker myself but I still like the odd glass of wine.”

“Especially when the beer’s run out, eh?” I asked, politely.

Mark muttered to himself, then angrily burst out, “I know your type. You’re all the same. You’re the ones that’ve stuffed up our education system. I know this type, I know these kinds of teachers, I’ve met them before. They think they’re God almighty.”

Throughout the evening Glenn had been quietly watching and listening to the barbecue conversation, how it developed from its initial pleasantries to the exchange of views and development of monologues. Now he was witnessing its degeneration and fracturing into alcoholic babble. Duncan couldn’t justify such alcoholic imbecility.

All night he’d sketched mental pictures of the people with whom he was destined to work together at the school on his first teaching appointment. “Take them as they come,” he’d thought to himself. “Why bother getting worked up about unionism and the like.”

Karen caught Glenn’s eye and because she didn’t know what to say, fell back to the ordering someone around. (When in doubt, tell someone to do something.)

“Well, Glenn, if you’re still sober by the time we both get back to the teacher’s flat,” she began in a mocking tone, knowing full well that Glenn wasn’t drinking alcohol, “you can still clean the bathroom and toilet before the weekend.”

“Yeah, all right, I’ll do it,” he responded with indifference. “Are you going to your mother’s again, Karen?”

“Yes,” she eagerly replied. “I’m going home again. My mother’s not feeling the best. She’s been on and off for a while now. Teaching’s wearing her out and my father’s not been much help either. He’s such a brute to her. He still physically abuses her and …”

Glenn continued nodding and taking it all in but he had switched off to Karen’s story. He was sharing the teacher’s flat with Karen and Ann-Marie Aulsebrook. The house occupied the corner block of Church and Compston Streets, just next to the empty block adjacent to our house.

When Glenn indicated to the gathering that he would be calling it a night, I also rose from my chair and bade the hard core a good night. Together we walked back to the houses which had become our homes. As I opened our front gate, Glenn followed up on an earlier barbecue conversation. “Who is this Popper?” he asked.

“I wrote my thesis on his work. During the 70s it was fashionable for scientists to seek theory falsification rather than theory verification.”

“How does that fit into Bertrand Russell’s thinking patterns?” Glenn asked.

“Goodness me, Glenn,” I said rather wearily. “It’s too late for that kind of thinking.” Then, as if someone had touched me with one of those high-voltage cattle prodders, I changed mine. “What nonsense! It’s never too late for thinking, is it, Glenn? Fancy me getting lethargic just when the owls of Minerva have taken to flight. Bertrand Russell was basically a mathematician who gave philosophy a solid mathematical foundation. Together with Whitehead he wished to find theoretical certainties - absolutes. For him the absolute of God does not exist. Ironically he couldn’t find emotional certainty either. He went through about four women in his quest for love. Some nasty commentators see this kind of behaviour as infantile.”

“And did he find any certainties, any absolutes?”

“He tried, through his mathematical theorising. But in the end he found that his supposed mathematical certainties swayed in the wind.”

“What do you mean?” Glenn asked.

“Well, Popper wrote about the logic of scientific discovery and he realised that progress is often hampered where theories are turned into dogmatic postulates, when they become an ideology of correct thinking. He claims that we should happily falsify theories, we should not be afraid to discover false theories.”

Just then the veranda light came on and Georgia, my wife, called out, “Is the barbecue still on?”
“Yes, Georgina, but not for us. We’re just talking about philosophy.”

“I’ll be off now,” Glenn said rather softly. “We’ll have to continue this discussion another time.”

“Most certainly, Glenn. I find Ray’s social gossip a waste of time. It doesn’t help us to become better teachers. There’s no need to knock the ones who are down and out of luck.”

“Yeah, well I’ll be going now,” Glenn said and disappeared into the night.

“Who is this Glenn Duncan?” my wife asked.

“Oh, he’s a first-year-out art teacher. He’s had three years’ industrial experience, and worked in advertising before throwing that in for teacher training.”

“I would have thought that there’s money in advertising,” Georgina replied.

“There is for the select few. But Duncan didn’t like to prostitute himself for money. He has moral scruples when it comes to his work. He certainly doesn’t fit into the traditional art teacher mould, does he?”

“I wouldn’t have picked him as an art teacher. He’s dressed too conventionally. Mind you, you aren’t the typical English teacher either,” she said tauntingly. “I like Glenn,” she continued. “He’s not as noisy and self-opinionated as some of the others. What’s he like as a teacher?’

“I don’t know dear. I haven’t seen him at work yet. I just know that this fellow uses his head and that’s good enough for me. How’s the little one?”

“Shh! Asleep,” she whispered as we moved into our new home. We could still hear some noise from the hard-core next door. There was a burst of high-pitched, almost hysterical laughter. It could have come from either a man or a woman. It was difficult to tell and I couldn’t be bothered to pursue this kind of thought any further. It was time to devote all my attention to Georgina.

CHAPTER TWO PECKING ORDERS

A summer aerial view of Goroke township highlights many green patches that punctuate an otherwise brownish, bleached countryside. That's the power of the sun and the absence of water at work. Small green dots mark the immaculately manicured lawns that surround most of Goroke's homes. There is one unique lawn which is of interest only because it is just that - a lawn set in concrete. Since 1986 people have wondered whether Jack will ever get around to painting his concrete green.

It was during 1986 that Goroke won the Category 1 section of the Victorian Tidy Towns Award. It was a proud moment for the whole town because everyone made a determined effort to clean up any obvious mess. Even Bland's of Goroke, that eye-sore in Main Street, received a paint-job. Garden beds were also rejuvenated and this made Main Street a very pleasant thoroughfare. I was certainly proud to have accompanied Edwin Mitchell, James Hawkes and Bob Walker to Werribee where Premier John Cain presented us with the commemorative plaque. Though a little worse for wear, it still remains above the front door of the Goroke Memorial Hall where Graham Chanoweth mounted it after we brought it back from Werribee.

It seems odd, however, that Marge Emmerson, who continues to tend the cemetery beds to this day, didn't attend the prize-giving ceremony. Nor did Dot Chenoweth the other person who tends these beds as if they were her own. Some residents say it is a shame that the Shire of Kowree and its locally elected representatives care so little for the town itself. Come election time - well, that's another story. But most members cannot sustain their effort; and self-interest and primitive in-fighting, settling real and imaginary scores, takes up all their time. Both Ron Major and Edwin Mitchell have attempted to unseat long-serving members, to no avail. Bob Walker and Geoff Carracher knew well how to win over the electorate. Belonging to the football club was the single most important requirement.

There are visible from the air also distinctly larger green areas. West of the town centre lies the football ground, the swimming pool and bowling green; to the east are the Health Centre's lawns and the school's large ovals. Summer dreariness highlights the school's oasis. This couldn't be said for its buildings. How could this be an oasis of learning when the school offered its teachers and students such a uniformly depressive collection of buildings? To find such a neglected school in Victoria reflected upon a somewhat heartless bureaucracy. The community had done all it could to fight off the Melbourne bureaucracy which aimed to close the secondary section of the school during the late 60s early 70s.

The school's toilet block, especially, reminded me of fourth world standards. In fact, when I recalled how Nigerians handle their sanitation requirements, I felt that it would have been best for the school community to do likewise. Nigerian males carry with them plastic tea kettles filled with water. When they need to go to the toilet - and there are no public facilities in the bush or country towns - they merely step off the road and crouch down on the nature strip, or against a tree, and complete their business that way. Their long, flowing robes ensure privacy. The washing of the left hand afterwards is considered to be an act of purification. Women are permitted to enter a stranger's house when nature calls. And just as in Nigeria during the wet season, at Goroke Consolidated during the winter the toilet block became a cesspool, shared by both teachers and students. So much for the ideal of equality. It didn't surprise me that a number of students used the facilities as an open smoking area - few teachers bothered to venture so far from civilisation.

The school complex was a product of the prevailing 1950s education philosophy which made it fashionable to cluster, to consolidate the one-teacher rural schools. Eleven of these schools had been transported to Goroke. From the west arrived Minimay, Lemon Springs, Peronne, Booroopki and Dopewora. From the east came Nurcoung, Koonik Koonik, Gymbowen and Kalingur, and from the

south Kangawall and Karnak. It was not an uplifting sight to see these ancient huts huddled together. What brightened the school complex was a thirty-year old promise that a new school would soon replace the old buildings.

I recall premier Cain, in 1990, heading Melbourne's bid to host the 1996 Olympic Games. The campaign was sold to the public as a second coming of the Lord. Anyone who dared think otherwise was a heretic. The messianic fervour engulfed the whole Labor Party. There was talk of sending a rugby team to South Africa. Mr Cain threatened that this proposal might influence Melbourne's chances of winning the Olympic bid. Public criticism of government policy was also forbidden on such spurious grounds. Millions of dollars were spent in advertising the bid. Olympic flags fluttered in the city - heralding the coming of the Messiah. Such frenzied activity is beyond questioning! Yet the only people who profit from such activity work in the advertising and related industries.

In some sense Goroke's problem was minutely reflected in Melbourne's ultimate failure to win the Olympic bid. Goroke was flanked by larger town centres. To the north there were Kaniva and Nhill; to the east there was Horsham, the capital of the Wimmera where two large secondary schools attracted many country students from outlying areas; south-west of Goroke there was Edenhope. All centres had proper primary and secondary schools, while Goroke had this hybrid of a primary school with a secondary school annex - controlled by Horsham Technical School.

The Melbourne-based education bureaucracy was not at all convinced that the Goroke community needed new school buildings. As late as 1969 it had sent a headmaster, Don Gordon, to the school with the express purpose of winding it down, of eliminating the "demand" for secondary education. In a series of newsletters parents were informed of what was going to happen to the school. This created uncertainty within the minds of those parents who were planning their children's future education. The uncertainty reached a point where, statistically, the proposed enrolment for Year 7 and 8 had dropped markedly. The justification of falling enrolment figures was thereby achieved.

This was enough for the Melbourne bureaucrats to prepare plans which would dismantle Goroke's secondary facilities. A truck arrived from the capital to cart off the contents of our typewriter room. Unfortunately the doors to this room were locked and somehow the key couldn't be located anywhere. A small dedicated group of people, including John and Heather Crabtree, began to mobilise their local member of parliament. He, in turn, arranged for them to meet with the minister in Melbourne. The delegation returned with some success. The secondary section of the school was to remain and nothing was to be taken from the school.

The community had been well supported by their local member of parliament. Unfortunately, this member was later to become embroiled in his own personal troubles when he became entangled with the infant conservationist movement. The battle over the nature of the Little Desert was won by people who wished to turn this area into a national park. And so instead of seeing an endless stream of cars driving along the MacDonald Highway, we now see city tourists taking their four-wheelers along this sandy track, enjoying from the comfort of their air-conditioned cabins the pristine beauties of this wilderness park. Native flora and fauna abound in this area. The Little Desert Lodge, just south of Nhill, specialises in educating the tourists and 'Whimpey' Reichert, who runs the business, was even declared a national treasure.

Meanwhile the school facilities remained intact but primitive and run-down. The tattered staffroom dispirited anyone who had been used to the luxury of a normal school staffroom. The roof leaked and the floorboards responded in kind - they were gradually rotting away. Any hole was covered by an equally rotting carpet, and if the holes became unsafe, then a masonite board would do the job - at least for a while, until another piece of board gave up and lost the fight for which it had been designed. The

decrepit toilet block was a stinking cesspool, especially when a shower of rain left stagnant puddles on the pock-marked concrete floor. We never knew whether some devilish student had indulged in one of those regular urinating competitions.

The acid stench which rose from the toilet block also effectively killed any tobacco fumes which may have wafted towards the staffroom. It was not school policy to condone smoking but there was no-one willing to hunt down the offenders in the toilet block. Thus we had students who made use of this slack enforcing of a school rule. For the sake of a smoke they would huddle inside a small toilet cubicle with a battered door half closed. One wonders what toilet conditions these students had at home.

What was lacking in physical comfort at school was made up by the warm welcome extended to newcomers by the old guard. Two teachers, especially, exuded kindness - Audrey McLean and Jess Batson. They had already spent more than 30 collective years at the school. Jess, tall and slim and Audrey short and solid, welcomed the new teacher. Quietly and sincerely they extended their hospitality. There was no frenzied pumping of hands, no hysterical laughter of agreement. Audrey provided morning tea for all staff, punctually and regularly, often throwing in a generous selection of her biscuits. She also collected the school mail, the morning newspaper, and she washed the dishes after school. She also tidied up the mess left by those teachers who had not yet learned to set a personal example in matters of personal tidiness.

Jess spoke obligingly about her work and her Year 6 students. She spoke quietly, very much in the style of the firm but fair school-mistress that she was. For Ray she embodied dictatorial class control - but the students loved her and they learned a lot in her class.

Joan Oliver joined the two women sitting on their rickety chairs. She, too, had been at the school for many years. But in contrast to Audrey and Jess, she did not hold back her thoughts. She courageously expressed her views on any topic. She was a farmer's wife who had also raised three children. She had thereby been challenged by situations involving growing children beyond the classroom, beyond the school environment. Farming had taught her to overcome the vagaries of seasonal fluctuations without vainly seeking to control them. The primordial fight for survival served as a primer for good, realistic teaching competence.

Joan didn't stay long in the staffroom. She grabbed a cup of coffee, gulped it down, then excused herself from the others, saying "I've got to prepare my new syllabus. Ray wants me to have it done by next week. Last year he did the same thing to me. When he finally accepted my syllabus, I had to laugh. He didn't know that it was the first one that he'd had a look at and found wanting. I'm going to do it again this time. He's always telling me to change, change. That's his way of keeping teachers on the run. But he's too dumb to keep a record of what he's saying. Otherwise he would catch himself out and stop this game."

As Joan slipped out of the staffroom, Ray was about to enter. He greeted her with one of his mechanical, exaggerated smiles. His beard effectively hid his true feelings. "God, she talks a lot, doesn't she?" he exclaimed as he sat down next to Jess and Audrey. Neither answered his question, perhaps because they assumed it was merely rhetorical. In any case they were too wise to respond to such a divisive comment. Just then the office lady, the school secretary, Julie-Anne Steyn burst upon the scene. In her high-pitched voice she squealed: "Raaaayyy, you're wanted on the phone."

"Tell them I'm not in," he snapped, and continued to munch Audrey's chocolate biscuits. Then he changed his mind and asked who it was.

"Mrs Cox," Julie-Anne replied.

“Gee, that woman’s always calling and complaining. What does she want this time?” He rose from his chair, placed his cup on a side table and slowly walked to the office.

For a while the staffroom buzz continued. Then a piercing burst of laughter from the office startled us. “Whose hysterical laugh is that?” I asked. At that moment Ray re-entered the room, grinning from ear to ear.

“That was typical Cox,” he sneered. “Those drunkards want to tell me that they can’t afford the swimming-bus fare. They can get stuffed and have their kids stay at school for extra work.”

Val Bull, the school’s music teacher, sometime English teacher, now librarian, chipped in. “Oh, don’t worry about extra work, Ray. Kerry and Belinda aren’t capable of work. Look at the whole family. Even the two sons are alcoholics. The best you can do for them is send them around the school grounds picking up rubbish.”

Val was another local farmer’s wife who had a peculiar view of the world. It predated Keppler, Galileo and Copernicus, for Val still believed in an earth-centred solar system. She likewise considered herself to be the centre of every item of gossip. She laughed at anything that had the power to sting someone else. Her protruding stomach would wobble in unison with her bursts of laughter. Ray didn’t think much of her classroom work and hence for 1983 he had put her into the library.

“I’ll look after the stragglers,” I said. “I don’t mind not going to the pool. I’ll give Kerry some oral work. I don’t think she’s ever been taught to speak properly.”

At this point Ann-Marie Aulsebrook, the young enthusiastic sports mistress entered the staffroom. “What’s this? Kerry’s not going swimming? She’s quite good at it, too. She’s a reasonable swimmer, but I don’t know why she won’t co-operate with me on sports days.”

Val responded. “Don’t waste your time with her. She’s just disadvantaged, that’s all. I’ve tried to work with her on music. After five years I just gave up trying to get some music into her. It just won’t stick in her mind.”

Ann-Marie was one of the few teachers who was really overloaded. Her extensive physical education program ranged from Preps to senior secondary school - she put all 150 children through the hoops. Yet she never complained about her work She loved her job and she loved to organise the whole school into daily before-class jogs around the oval. Some students grumbled but all participated. Even Kerry Cox bedevilled her critics by sprinting around the oval in record time.

Ann-Marie had enthused the whole school population, including most of the teachers. She managed to generate within the younger children a healthy sense of competition. She built upon the spontaneity found in youngsters as yet not subjected to personal mood-swings. That’s why some moody adolescents felt incensed when delighted toddlers sprinted past them. The older slackers would then pick themselves up, make odd noises and gesture suggestively as they sped past younger students. Afterwards these adolescents would settle down to a good day’s work. It seemed as if the oval sprint had soothed their physiological yearnings for combat. Of course, by the end of the school day many students had once again built up their stress level.

After school, the Mothers’ Club and School Council hosted a barbecue. It was an opportune moment for new staff to meet the community. Ray’s welcoming speech was full of mirth and joviality. He was a good talker and he loved to tell a joke. “… and although we are still waiting for our new toilet block, I

am assured by Audrey that the old seat still comfortably holds her weight." Most laughed at this even though some felt Ray had been a little tactless. The vice-principal, David Hatherell winced but remained silent. David had just recovered from the previous year's demotion. Ray had, upon his arrival at the school, publicly demoted David from his nominal post of heading the secondary section of the school. This year he was back in action, but even at this gathering I could detect tensions between the two men.

After the speech the people effortlessly intermingled. I met Lynn Mann and Dianne Walter with whom I had been to school at Edenhope High during the sixties. The three of us briefly reminisced about the good old days - which weren't perhaps that good after all. The two had remained in the district and married while I took off to study and travel the world.

"Well, Fredrick, you've done well," Dianne said. "But why come here to teach?"

"This is a kind of homecoming, Dianne. I've come home to raise a family. Our little boy is just two years old and we're hoping to get him a sister. Sounds corny, doesn't it?"

"Not really," Lynn said. "I've done just that. I'm still raising our family."

And so the late afternoon faded into early evening. The dozen or so new teachers went home with some appreciation of what rural Goroke was going to be like.

That evening, while my wife was preparing our little fellow for bed, I asked her what she thought of the people. "The locals seem to be good," she said, "but some of the teachers are really weird. But they were certainly better behaved than at the barbecue."

"You're right, dear," I replied. "some of them need to polish themselves a bit, don't they?"

We both felt we could make Goroke our home and we were prepared to work at that. I joined the fire brigade and became a voluntary ambulance driver. Anyone who really wished to be busy could join the dozens of clubs which always welcomed new members. Only much later did I hear Ray boast about his success in helping disadvantaged families. "When I arrived here in 1982," he said, "one family in the district was receiving a Maintenance Allowance. There are now seven families receiving help and four families are being helped by State School Relief."

Ray liked helping people. Most people do. But Ray was different. He would sulk, becoming malicious and angry if his offer of help was misplaced. He would lament that he had done his best but that his help had been rejected. Never once had it crossed his mind that he also needed help. He would not admit that he, too, was in a learning situation, that he would also make mistakes in his new job as principal of Goroke Consolidated School. Ray liked to make people dependent upon his will. No mature consideration of the consequences of such an attitude was to move him to consider concepts such as independence and interdependence.

THREE EASTER CELEBRATIONS

As a school, Goroke Consolidated had a lot to offer secondary teachers. Especially those secondaries who had lost complete touch with primary teaching. Here at Goroke it was not possible to bucket some distant primary school, some particular primary teacher for not having prepared students for secondary schooling. Here primary and secondary teachers shared one school complex, and the staffroom saw them sitting side by side sharing countless sups of coffee and thousands of words about how particular students managed the transition from a controlled primary environment into the sometimes chaotic secondary setting.

This division had been formalised by the three unions which represented Victoria's teachers. The Victorian Teachers' Union represented primary teachers, the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association claimed exclusive membership of the state's high school teachers, and the Victorian Technical Teachers' Union embraced all those teaching in technical schools. It registered its own teachers, demanding that they have some industrial experience before being permitted to teach. This made technical teachers seem more practical and realistic as concerns about school discipline grew. They were the last to favour abolition of corporal punishment.

Today the unions have merged. The VSTA was the last to hold out on its own. But with a threatened decimation of its ranks at the next state election it was inevitable that all three would join into a super-union, thereby hoping to frustrate the Liberal government's bid to get the system back on the rails.

Ray McCraw, in his second year at the school, did not wish to have the school broken up into primary and secondary sections. Nor did I. Considering the nature of education, it seemed sensible to view the whole school as one unit. The vice principal, David Hatherell, didn't agree. The first festive occasion at the school accentuated this clash of views.

It was traditional for the school to celebrate Easter with a fancy dress parade. The primary teachers, Jess, Audry, Alice Black, Joan and her daughter-in-law, Maree Oliver, organised the morning's events. All primary students had dressed up for the occasion. My Year 7's also wished to participate. They still fondly recalled last year's fun-time, and I saw this as more than getting out of classwork for the morning. In any case, I would use the occasion for some essay-writing exercise and so I delighted in their dressing up and joining the juniors. It also gave me an opportunity to focus on the cultural significance of this celebration. I did not shy away from presenting the issue from both a religious and secular point of view. While most senior students had a sceptical appreciation of the religious significance of Easter, their parents certainly celebrated it in their respective churches in town. Church Street at Easter time had parking problems, as did the northern half of Station Street.

The primary teachers were therefore imbuing their children with a valued tradition. They had spent a whole week preparing their costumes, their hats and their funny little sketches. Mothers, and sadly only a couple of fathers, came along to see their little ones parade on the school's front lawn. And while the primaries hopped about and jumped for joy, some of the older secondary students looked on and sniggered at the uninhibited enthusiasm. And David Hatherell had disappeared from view - nor could the principal, Ray McCraw be seen sharing this fun.

I heard some secondary student say, "Ha, look at them! How childish to dress up like that. These silly costumes look ridiculous. They must be mad to walk around in a circle like a mob of sheep." Someone impersonated a kelpie with grumbles of "Go back, go back, fetch'm up."

"Isn't it silly, sir," Jane said to me.

“Why, Jane?” I asked.

“It just is,” she replied and skipped off. She herself had been dressed in school uniform but the top button of her blouse was undone and her skirt seemed unnecessarily short.

The parade ended about half an hour before lunch, and because David had disappeared from view, none of the other secondary teachers knew what to do with their students, none of whom wished to return to class for just 30 minutes. A handful of the 50 students approached me. “Can’t we have our lunch now?” they asked.

“OK,” I said, “Why not? But town students must stay until the bell.”

“Can we start up the radio station, sir?” asked Kerry.

“No, not yet,” I responded.

“Why not?” she asked.

“Because you can hear the music in town and what would people think if we began to broadcast before lunch-time? We should be in class working, you know!”

Three boys and two girls ran off into the relocatable building which served as the temporary school office. Therein was a little office which we had hijacked as our radio room, our studio.

Some of my students who found written English demanding really enjoyed working in the studio. They had to fill in a daily running sheet. But talking into a microphone and chatting away, giving time calls and station identification, announcing record titles - and most importantly giving their names …. all this unfroze some of their talents. Robert Ferlazzo once remarked, “I didn’t know old Kerry Cox had it in her to string together a dozen words. She sounds literate on radio.” Then I knew that this was a valuable activity.

The radio station 3GS had an indirect effect on student life. Whenever the station closed down at the end of lunch time, the duty announcer would play the station theme, followed by the national anthem. This would be followed by the school bell. After a few weeks of broadcasting, however, it seemed that ringing the school bell was superfluous. The national anthem became associated with the bell, and it effectively called students to the classroom. Later, the beginnings of the station theme saw students from the far end of the oval or near the BMX track move back to their respective classrooms. The five minute warning bell had become irrelevant. And some people didn’t like that. The radio station activity had hijacked the airways.

Mark Weegberg made no secret of his dislike for ‘God Save The Queen’. He ridiculed anything regal. First-year-out social science teacher, John Bell, joined Mark in a subtle form of ridiculing me. They would not listen to my justification and when I changed over to ‘Advance Australia Fair’, in line with changing social sentiments, they claimed the whole radio concept was a waste of time because it was too formal. “We should fly the Eureka flag, and as to that Monday morning dedication! Well, what bullshit! Fancy asking students to love God and country! I can just get the country bit but what’s this bullshit about cheerfully obeying parents, teachers and the law!”

Weegberg huffed and puffed and sneered while John Bell made elephantine noises which reverberated throughout the school. I had entered the staffroom at the tail-end of their bitching. “At the moment we still have the Queen as our national symbol and when we do become a republic, then we’ll perhaps

play something else. In any case at our morning assembly we still sing ‘God Save the Queen’. When we change over to ‘Advance Australia Fair’, then we’ll also change our closing. And Mark, what’s wrong in giving our students the dedication? Isn’t it worth while giving them a bit of a moral framework?”

“Waste of time, and it’s not necessary either.” he snapped.

“Did you have trouble obeying your parents, teachers and the law, Mark? You know we must set a personal example to our students, mustn’t we?”

“That’s got nothing to do with it,” he huffed and puffed, becoming visibly irritable. He reminded me of prime minister, Bob Hawke, who, whenever he was asked moral questions, became indignant at anyone questioning his integrity. The huff and puff bluff method of getting out a sticky situation did not appeal to me - and then I usually did not let myself be huffed and puffed into silence. “What did you learn at school about personal self-control, Mark?” I asked.

He glared at me and looked an awesome sight as his bearded face bristled with hatred. He turned and stomped out of the staffroom, gasping like a winded boxer. He strutted towards the toilet block, growling through his bearded face at two boys throwing sand at one another. He roared at them, his head shaking, almost dislocating his steel-rimmed glasses.

That afternoon the principal called an extraordinary staff meeting. “I’m not going to be here next Monday and that’s why we’re having this meeting today, Friday.”

David Hatherell sat at the back of the staffroom and muttered for all to hear, “This school has a primary and a secondary section and the secondary staff meeting will still be held next Monday.”

Ray ignored this muted interjection. He continued discussing matters that concerned the whole school. I couldn’t understand why David insisted on having the school split.

McCraw appeared to be a reasonable man who had supported me whole-heartedly in my radio activity. I had not detected any vindictiveness towards me, and I had also received permission from Ray to spend one lesson a week in Joan Oliver’s primary class. This experience was invaluable for me in understanding primary teaching. Primary and secondary teachers alike had to deal with both the willing and the reluctant learner. I suggested to Mark and John that perhaps professionally they would benefit by spending some time in a primary classroom. They received this as an attack upon their abilities, and both felt wounded by my suggestion.

Perhaps David Hatherell’s attitude didn’t help to bridge the gap between primary and secondary education at Goroke. “Ray doesn’t understand secondary teaching,” he told me when once we sat alone together in the staffroom. “Ray thinks he can solve disciplinary problems with primary bluff tactics.”

“What do you mean, David?” I asked, rather puzzled. I had seen secondary teachers use such techniques - with mixed success. We had one on our present staff. “Isn’t it good to have an educational continuum at school? At St Arnaud High School I met secondary teachers who blamed all their class problems on their primary school colleagues. There was Head of Department, Frank O’Dea, who never failed to point out that English standards had slipped because primary students were not taught properly. He didn’t like my approach of implementing a rigorous basic program of spelling, dictation and paragraph writing exercises because in his eyes it was too formal. At Goroke we can’t blame the primary teachers because they are within the school. If we have problems, then we can always talk to them. It stops us from passing the buck.”

“I agree with that, certainly,” David replied, thoughtfully looking into his coffee cup. “But you can’t treat secondary students the way you treat primary children. Once a child reaches puberty, we must adapt our disciplinary approach to this most challenging developmental stage.”

“But isn’t Ray doing that?” I asked.

“No, he can’t cope with it. He wants some kind of system of discipline at school that will establish discipline for him. It’s almost as if he’s afraid to assert himself before a group of young men.”

“Well, David, I don’t know anything about this matter. It’s just that I like the idea of having a P-12 school, where there is no arbitrary primary-secondary division.”

“Just watch out for McCraw. He can be very nasty, very vindictive.”

“What do you mean, David?”

“I don’t want to say any more about it, but last year he demoted me from the vice-principal’s position.”

I could sense David becoming nervous, almost frightened, and didn’t press him any further on this somewhat strange issue. ‘The plot thickens.’ I thought to myself. Little could I have visualised David requesting a year’s leave without pay some time later in third term. But Frank Peck, a senior staffing officer in the Ministry refused his application. He let David wait an hour outside his office before telling him “We need you at Goroke in 1984. We can’t have you leave that place. We’re expecting problems there.”

So David was to resign from the Department, only rejoin it a couple of years later at Hamilton Technical School.

FOUR WORK ETHOS

Habit is the flywheel of society, says David Hume. So it is within a school. After a few weeks into term, routine takes over and students become restless. Intellectual challenges absorb only the few. For the majority, it's the emotional throbbings which propel them out of boredom - and often into some kind of trouble.

"At the end of July the shit usually hits the fan," Ray said to me as we shared a cup of coffee in the staffroom. For me, the usual student disciplinary problems remained insignificant. All teachers had problems with one or another student. I had had good experience in a number of overseas schools and what faced me at Goroke seemed trivial. We had as yet not reached the dramatic heights reached by schools in inner London or in the United States of America. School violence was still a relatively contained matter, though the western suburbs revealed their schools had become more prone to direct student-teacher attacks. But even Horsham's secondary schools had students who made women teachers cry.

The problem seemed to me to rest on students' inability to create, to articulate their feelings. The thug, the basher, the violent student is in most cases seriously illiterate and highly frustrated. What had school done for such students? Teaching seems to me to be so professionally demanding. Teachers must set a personal example to their students. Young minds are easily disillusioned by hypocritical behaviour. An English teacher who does not value the beauties of the language, who believes that a basic command of the language is not really necessary, is wasting students' valuable time and effort.

I taught English in a methodologically mixed fashion. On the one hand I had to grapple with the problem of imbuing students with the basics. On the other hand I had to extend their work beyond mere spelling, punctuation and paragraph writing. There was also the imperative that English ought to offer the student an introduction to our cultural heritage. And so I offered my students a varied selection of novels, plays and poetry. It always amazed me how some students shied away from poetry. At St Arnaud I had a computer program which enabled students to be quite creative. All they had to do was fill in certain gaps on a screen and the computer would provide the rhyme and rhythm. Unfortunately most of the boys delighted in selecting words associated with bodily or sexual functions. My Head of Department congratulated me for having had the courage to enter the classroom with a poetry book under my arm.

At Goroke, one of the tamer responses came from Keith, then Year 8. He expressed a basic level which seemed common among these fellows just beginning to fight their puberty blues:

My name is Keith
But my friends call me Emmo
Because I'll give the girls a free demo.
I like to have roots
But I don't like prostitutes
Because they have pox
And so does Cox.
I get the horn
Because I eat corn

I also exposed my students to the business of publishing their own books. I felt it important to demystify books generally. Few had realised that behind every book there is are people who have worked hard to put something together. One of my students did put together a book of sorts. She merely drew pictures, and then in non-sequential order. It was certainly not English work at secondary

level. But again, with some guidance and extra time, the other students managed to create an interesting text for her picture book.

A year later I linked up with art teacher, Glenn Duncan, to produce a Year 7 book that we called 'A Very Tall Short Story'. Students worked out their story-line in English, then continued to develop a visual representation of this in art class. This was a truly inter-disciplinary effort which did not water down our respective subjects, as had occurred at Leongatha where English, history and geography had become a 'progressive' hybrid called social science.

After a few weeks I noticed that Ray had embraced the trendy process writing approach which some north American pedagogue had sold as a panacea to Australian educationists. A promise that this would raise the level of literacy in our schools was loudly proclaimed. Process writing wasn't anything particularly new, though. We'd been doing this kind of work in English for as long as I can remember - only better. We did correct spelling errors instead of telling the students that 'creative' spelling was acceptable because of dyslexia or some such justification. That was the only difference. We corrected various drafts with students. Naturally it meant that we had a lot more work to take home for marking. But, after all, that was an English teacher's lot.

I felt that under the much-heralded new method students still had to think about a story outline. They had to plan their outline and then write a number of rough copies which I checked thoroughly. The final copy was, of course, near-perfect in form and content. This attitude, though, was not shared by some teachers. When I heard Cathy Coutts, one of the new primary teachers just out of college, call out to her class "Come on you lot, get on with your process writing!" I wondered whether there was actually any difference in telling them "Come on you lot, get on with your writing." Later the principal attempted to sell Process Writing to the community by describing it as a new method of instruction. He set up John Bell, the new social science teacher - first year out and glad to have a job - to lead this new project.

The remedial English classes now became Process Writing classes. The enthusiastic public announcement of this new program did not fulfil its promise. After a few weeks the novelty wore off and remedial students, as well as the general public, saw through it. The old remedial tag was back in use and Process Writing had been exposed for what it was. Illiterate students still couldn't write their names because they had never learned to sound out the alphabet. Bell, himself, didn't know anything about the Goodman ideology which had created dyslexia in so many students. Nor did he have the material at school with which he could begin basic word-drill with these illiterate secondary students. He entertained them by giving them busy-work. They liked him because he didn't stress them. His Process Writing classes, while they continued to function on the time-table, were in fact talk classes. All the more reason to expose the students to a rigorous program which transferred the talk, in written form, on to paper.

Some students hated to have their work displayed on the board, for very good reasons. Poor effort, nearly always a result of laziness, soon became obvious to all who entered the classroom. Positive praise for good work and effort was nearly always welcomed by my students, though there were the odd students who pretended not to like praise. I encouraged students to be proud of their achievements. Poor work and disruptive behaviour usually came together. These students knew when an inexperienced teacher came before them. Disruptive students, reluctant learners could smell out the hesitant, the sensitive teacher who was still worrying about his class performance. They focused on such teachers and gave them hell.

Ray McCraw didn't like noisy classes. Even 'creative noise' frightened him, so it appeared. He believed that a teacher must be in 'control' of his class - the operative word was control. Yet, there

seemed to be an interesting contradiction in his attitude. “Jess’s class is always very quiet,” I said to him during a discussion on discipline. He sneered and said: “They may be very quiet, and you can hear the kids’ brains ticking over, but she’s too old. She’s been at Goroke for over 30 years. I think we have to get rid of her. She’s just deadwood, and she’s too dictatorial in her classroom. The kids fear her.”

“Perhaps,” I responded, “but I also think they really respect her.”

Ray didn’t respond, and I couldn’t make sense of what he had just said. Why would he attack Jess like that? Surely age is no barrier to effective teaching? Isn’t age exactly what we need in the state system so that we have a worthy tradition to fall back on? Jess had good class control and her students worked very well. Why would McCraw, in his second year as principal of the school, be at odds with a long-serving member of staff? Was it that Jess had seen too many principals, that she wasn’t too impressed with this little ball of frenzy who wanted to introduce new methods of teaching into the whole school? She had also witnessed the overnight removal of a teacher and his family. She never knew why this had happened, but she could guess. And so she remained aloof at staffroom squabbles. Instead, she had a great passion for horses. In June 1983 she took sick leave because of a bad back. A year later, while still on sick-leave she was upgraded to a principal’s classification. Six months later she retired from the service. What a way to go!

Ray didn’t say anything else about Jess, but he began on another person. “Glenn had better pull his finger out and get his class under control. The kids are too noisy in art.”

“That’s nearly always the case in art classes,” I replied. “I remember my own student days and art classes were always alive.”

“You seem to get along with Glenn,” Ray observed.

“Yes,” I answered. “He’s a good fellow. This is his first time away from home and he’s just finding himself in his first teaching appointment. It takes time to settle into a school. You need at least one to two years before you’ve laid the groundwork for your own base.”

“Well, I’m not giving him that much time. See if you can help him. He’s got to do something with that massive disciplinary problem.”

“I don’t know whether he’s got such a massive problem, Ray,” I said. “There are other seasoned teachers who are worse. Weegberg, for example, can’t seem to handle Jodie and a few of the other trouble-makers.”

“Glenn’s still got to pull his finger out and become part of the team. In a large Melbourne school, they’d make mince-meat out of him.”

Ray seemed to be annoyed at me for talking about the matter, as if I could not see disciplinary problems in black and white.

“OK,” I replied. “I’ll visit his classes during my spare periods. I’ve always wished to develop my artistic potential - now’s the chance for me to do something about it.”

I smiled at myself for talking like that to Ray because I was aware of my artistic ability, or lack thereof. I know my limitations when it comes to art. Ray, on the other hand, seemed to be a strange person. On the one hand he approached his principal’s job very casually - at least he always dressed always casually. Now he was demanding from Glenn that he, within the first few weeks of school, develop

into an effective teacher, just like that. Was Ray, himself, setting a good example in this regard? Or was he still stuck in the a groove which played the old song of 'do as I tell and not do as I do'? The old them-us mentality flourished within him. To the local police officer he had actually said that Goroke was a community which consisted of them and us. If you were with him, then you were one of us. The classification was quite arbitrary and did not follow any logical pattern, except perhaps that of an emotional whim.

"Ray," I asked, "what happens when a person is in control of his class?"

"Well," he said sternly, "that's proof of meaningful learning taking place."

"And a teacher who is not in control of his class?"

"They're wasting their time trying to teach," he quipped.

"Does it follow that a person who is not in control of a class is therefore a failure?"

"It all depends," he replied.

"Ray, it bothers me, this idea of control, that we must always be in control of things. How do we feel when we are not in control of things?" I asked.

"It's your professionalism that gets you in control."

"But surely," I replied with interest, "if we always seek to control, then when we are not in control, we are bound to feel real failures. In any case, isn't it better to flow along with the tide of things?"

Ray's mind had blanked out for the moment. "I don't know what you're getting at, Fredrick."

By this time the staffroom had filled with teachers and Ray knew he had an audience. I then knew it was time for me to drop the subject and prepare myself for the staff meeting which had been called specifically to talk about student discipline. Some teachers thought that the abolition of corporal punishment had offered reluctant students field-day at school. Those teachers who retained high standards in their subjects found it especially difficult to handle reluctant learners. McCraw still retained the strap from his previous school. But only once or twice did he use it - and then on a primary student. He feared the secondaries because of their physical size.

The Year 9 and 10 students usually rebelled the most. McCraw saw it differently and blamed individual teachers for failing to control these adolescents. That's how he opened the staff meeting. "We must control this violent behaviour and most of you know that Jodie and Barbara were caught fighting in the corridor. I've suspended Jody and talked to Barbara in no uncertain terms."

There seemed to be a general feeling that this kind of punishment was treating a symptom but not the cause. Barbara was illiterate and Jody couldn't see any sense in attending school. But Ray had made his point about vicious students at the Goroke school. "And it is these kids who must be brought into line, and to achieve this we must introduce the Glaesser system of discipline."
"But Ray," Karen Reid began excitedly, "are you sure that the system will actually help the individual class teacher manage students like Kerry Cox? I've heard from my mum, who's a teacher, that at her school that disciplinary system is a failure."

“Look,” he responded in high-pitched voice, “I don’t believe that the system is a failure. If it is incorrectly applied, then we can expect it to fail. But I’ve seen it work well in some schools.”

“That’s fine, Ray,” Karen continued. “My mothers says the kids are abusing the out-room. It’s always the same kids who get sent to the room and it is a joke for them. It’s their way of beating the system, by being removed from class.”

“That’s the teacher’s fault then,” Ray jumped in. “The teachers who send kids on a continuous basis are doing something wrong. The Glaesser system is logical and effective, if only teachers implement it properly.”

I just thought to myself: ‘I’ve heard such an argument before. The communist apologists use the same argument that Marx’s theory is not being properly applied. It is improper to question whether the theory could be false’.

Glenn softly interjected. “At least we should have the Glaesser seminar. I don’t know anything about this system of discipline and I’m prepared to open myself to anything new.”

A general murmur of approval rippled through the small staffroom in which eighteen teachers sat in conference on a matter which would always remain a problem as long as we had schools. It was agreed that Regional Office’s resident psychologist, Damian O’Laughlan, would be invited to present a two-day seminar on this world-famous American disciplinary system.

Just as creationists have misled the credulous about archaeology on Mount Ararat in Turkey, so, too, we have educational experts propagating within our schools absurd theories about student discipline and learning. I cannot understand why we must embrace this material from overseas so blindly, without critical analysis. Why can’t we have among our educators a bunch of sceptics who, as in the clash between science and creationism, can bring some balance into the debate?

After the staff meeting I heard David Hatherell mutter something about being against the introduction of any system of discipline. “The kids at this school aren’t vicious,” he said rather exhaustedly. “You just have to live here for a few years to understand their personal problems. You can’t just impose a rigid system on them. Our kids are no more vicious than the kids from some of our best private schools …”

As we emerged from the school buildings and walked to the car park, Joan and Maree Oliver, Jess and Audrey had all huddled together for a quick talk before driving home. These primary teachers didn’t like what they had heard. Their faces revealed concern - not for the children of the school but rather for the principal. Their concern was heightened as Mark Weegberg emerged from the main entrance door, bubbling with enthusiasm. “That’s what Jody Lyall needs, a system of discipline. She’s rude and cheeky, and she just won’t listen to me.”

“Mark,” I said, “you know it is possible to enslave people by using regulations on them. I was in charge of a boarding school once and I soon had total control of the kids by giving them a rigid set of instructions. It drained them and it drained me. It made us all slaves to the rules. We were as over-regulated as a unionised workshop.”
“Look here,” Mark began to fluster, “you’d be nowhere without the teachers’ unions. If it wasn’t for them we’d still have no security of employment. We’d get hired and fired just like that. That’s just not good enough for me, and you can’t tell me that security of tenure isn’t important for you either.”

“Of course it is, Mark, you’re quite right.” I ended the discussion because I could sense the other teachers beginning to feel uncomfortable. Mark’s bluster had won the day. He was allowed to state his point of view so openly and loudly while I had to back off because my view was upsetting him. For the sake of peace I had to remain quiet or suffer the consequences of being labelled a trouble maker who upset Mark Weegberg. There was something inherently unjust about such an exchange of views. Mark, like the principal, worshipped the so-called ‘new’. Like McCraw, he worshipped at the shrine of ‘change’. Both incessantly talked about change to others. They exhorted us to change our old ways, our outmoded teaching techniques. They pontificated to the rest of the staff but no-one dared question their material. They did not notice that their own behaviour had become autocratic and dictatorial - they wished to dictate to others while they themselves never changed. They never had to change because they were the harbingers of the good news of ‘change’. This meant getting rid of the old gods as embodied in those teachers who had served the school for so many years, who had three generations of respect on their shoulders.

Take out the old and bring in the new - why? So that the cyclical nature of educational problems remains hidden, a mystery periodically requiring a new guru to articulate and define the new them-us, friend-foe category. Young teachers were without anchor and easily wafted in the wind of some faddism, remaining perpetual children, never developing, never maturing beyond the immediate, beyond the now, beyond today. Perpetual revolution in which yesterday and tomorrow had no meaning, where education had become value-free. This was topped off by their commitment to implementing equal opportunity and social justice strategies - all the stuff which warms the hearts of the social engineer. They have never woken up to the fact that there is no such thing as a value-free education. Any basic ethics course will soon put an end to such ideology. Surprisingly, the moral dimension was something which these advocates of change knew little about.

So I just shut up and made my way home from school. It took me about twenty minutes to walk back. Home for me was comfort, and it gave me a sense of purpose, a meaning in life. And yet, the tide was against the home, against the family unit. It was unfashionable, dreary and boring to express a conventional view of things. Even at Goroke, where the fear of God still prevailed, there appeared the progressive promiscuous ideal of wife swapping. Its beginnings remain a mystery because ultimately it is nothing new and it is the stuff that keeps literature going. But during the 70s it became fashionable to the extent that the Apex Clubs offered social evenings for the express purpose of encouraging marital infidelity.

Various clubs would organise evenings together, naturally hosted by an outside club. As the evening progressed intoxication would blur conventional restraints and have men throwing their car keys into a ring. Eager women would then fish them out again and thereby procure a mate for a while, sometimes for the night. These activities created a wave of desertion and divorce. The sexually mature, the socially secure, looked upon this with amusement, sometimes with regret and pity. It was sad to see adults playing such games, such trivial pursuits. Self inflicted pain always resulted from it, and the most hurt by such behaviour were the children - the innocent offspring who sooner or later learned all about dad’s or mum’s infidelity.

“Papa, Papa,” my son Karl shouted with joy as I appeared at the front door. He had heard the characteristic squeak of the door hinge herald my arrival. I lifted him into my arms., swung him around and cuddled him. His spontaneous laughter made me feel whole again. This was the reason why I was working - to be a father to this little boy. Years of study and thinking about life had brought me back to basics. Pursuing money or sensual delights cannot serve to give society any worth while values at all. Hedonism leads to nihilism, to personal disgust, while the creation and nurturing of life gives us a sense of purpose until it is our time to fade into oblivion - after having done our job!

“Hello, dear, how was your day at school?” my wife asked.

“Hello, dear. The usual reluctant learners learned reluctantly and the awake wanted more work.”

“Never mind,” she said, and we formed the usual three-fold embrace: father, mother and child.

“Let’s have a cup of tea, just relax,” she added, sympathetically comforting me.

“I don’t have to mark any work this evening because I completed it during my free periods,” I said, “and so we can go for a little bit of a drive.”

“I’m always ready to go for a drive,” she said.

And I knew that. It was one of our simple pleasures to which we attached a lot of importance. The drive through the rubbish tip bushes was always a delight. Usually after tea the three of us would take off before the setting sun gave us dusk kangaroo times.

On the northern outskirts of the town there was some scrubland called Goroke State Forest. It was the hunting ground for underage trail bikers, illegal shooters of kangaroos and litterbugs. The drive through those sandy tracks was exciting for Karl. For me there was only one sandy patch which gave me great concern. It was a touch and go situation and I was never certain whether this time we would sink and come to a full stop in its middle. For Georgina there was always the prospect that at the end of our trip she would lovingly carry Karl asleep from the car. No-one could have guessed that only five years later she would inflict upon our son a nightmare, a hurt for a lifetime.

FIVE THE IN-SERVICE

A curriculum day made the Glasser in-service compulsory for all primary and secondary teachers. Damian O'Laughlan, chain-smoking resident psychologist at the Horsham Regional Office, arrived one Tuesday morning in May. He introduced himself to an expectant group. Some of the younger teachers were anxious while the more seasoned welcomed this day as a break from classroom drudgery.

Juliann Stehn left her office domain and hurried into the staffroom with her characteristic nervous giggle. She giggled some more as Damian lit up another cigarette. In mute tone someone suggested we ought to have a seminar on how to quit smoking.

"Look," Mark suddenly huffed aloud, "I take exception to that. I don't like smoking but that doesn't mean I would stop anyone from exercising his or her right to smoke. You can't ban smoking, just like that, unless you're a dictator, like Hitler."

"Why not," asked Glenn. "We needn't become dictatorial about it but we could reach consensus on this issue. If we all agreed not to smoke, then we are effectively banning smoking at school. What's wrong with that?"

No-one responded and facial expressions indicated irritability.

"You know, Mark," I said, "there is a connection between smoking and discipline. A smoker does as he pleases. In company, however, we can expect him to be polite and ask whether anyone minds his smoking. Likewise, student misbehaviour is a selfish act because it prevents others from learning."

"Why is a smoker a he? You're a sexist, Fredrick," said Jane Wilkinson.

During 1983 Jane shared the English load with me at the school. During 1982 she had also begun a Year 7 French class which students and parents appreciated. She did not continue with this work during 1983 because the principal had advised her that the demand for French at the school had dried up. When I asked my Year 8s about this they merely expressed disappointment at not being allowed to go on with the subject. Jane would have had the time. Now she spent just a few hours a week on English.

She also spent lots of time worrying about herself. She had begun a relationship with a Natimuk farmer's son which proved somewhat difficult. Not on his account but rather on her attempting to understand her own physiological reactions to love-making. She wasn't a good looking girl but she had intelligence and her personality required more development. She felt sorry for the young man who wished to sleep with her because she couldn't imagine why anyone would want her. She left Goroke at the end of the year and threw herself into a city school, Gladstone Park - and unionism. A few years later she returned as teacher, then as subject advisor, stationed at Regional Office.

She didn't have much to do as a subject advisor because the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English and the Victorian Secondary Teachers' Association had a common English policy. Both shied away from exposing our students to a structured English program. Little wonder, then, that the Edenhope Secondary College principal, Bruce Wilson, supplemented his own children's English work with notes from the Correspondence School. Such work disciplined students to submit their work on time. Few people knew that such cosy arrangements could be made with the Correspondence School in Melbourne. Why its functions are being transferred to the Tafe system is not a mystery any longer. Its doors are closing.

“Quiet, please,” Ray interjected ever so gently, “it’s time we began this seminar.” His voice softened some more, his mouth parted into a big grin and his eyes sparkled with intent. “It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you Damian O’Laughlan. Damian comes from Regional Office and he has had extensive experience in implementing the Glasser system in a number of Wimmera schools. From what he has told me, and from what I’ve heard, I’m sure that if we adopted the system, we would solve all our serious disciplinary problems. Welcome to Goroke, Damian, it’s over to you.”

A good round of applause greeted our guest, who had begun to move away from the filing cabinet on which he had been resting his right elbow. He drew up one of the few remaining old wooden chairs, placed his left foot on its seat, then rested his folded arms on his raised knee.

“Well, yes, well,” he began haltingly. “Yes, the Glasser system, ladies and gentlemen, has been working quite well in a number of our schools.”

“Is it operating at any of the schools in our region?” I asked.

“Well no,” he replied in a slow, measured tone.

“Why not? Surely most of our schools share a common disciplinary problem?”

“Yes, er well, that’s true. Most of our schools have the same disciplinary problems. Yes, that’s quite true. I don’t really know why none of them haven’t adopted the system. Perhaps it’s because you’re so isolated from the mainstream educational trends.”

“The what?” asked Duncan, looking rather puzzled.

Damian paused for a moment, nervously puffed at his cigarette, then smiled at Duncan.

“Yes, well, that’s quite true. We are isolated here in the Wimmera from all those trends which sweep through progressive city schools.”

“If I may add something here,” Ray interjected in almost a whisper, “I’ve noticed that once you begin to talk with conservative country people and make an effort to explain what you’re on about, then they’ll usually see it your way.”

“Well, yes,” continued Damian, “the important thing is to discuss the matter firstly with you, the teachers, who have to implement the system. Then we go to the students and sell the idea to them. Finally we’ll then discuss the matter with the parents, starting with School Council, Mothers’ Club, and so on.”

“What?” I gasped. “You mean to say that we consult students before parents?”

“A matter of practicalities,” Damian replied, drawing heavily on his fast disappearing cigarette.

“Fredrick, I think we can discuss such things later,” Ray warned, “after we’ve heard what Glasser is all about. Let’s hear from Damian. Our time is limited and I suggest we stick to our agreed agenda.”

David, who was sitting next to me, muttered, “What agreed agenda?” But no-one heard him because Damian had already begun his monologue.

“Well, yes, that’s fine, yes. I don’t mind anyone asking questions at any time. Well, yes, the Glasser system was developed in the United States during the early 70s. Glasser is an expert on conflict resolutions. His studies have been carried out in many American and Canadian schools.”

As Damian continued the historical review of his subject matter, staff settled down and ignored the psychologist’s idiosyncrasies. For a while there were no uncomfortable interjections and McCraw was pleased. Regularly he would nod and smile at Mark, Robert, John, Glenn, Jane and Bruce. For a whole morning we listened to Damian, watching him chain smoke his way through the Glasser material. After an extended lunch break Damian subjected his audience to a simple test - what would you do if …

Karen Reid had now become openly hostile to the work. “Look, it’s all theory. It just doesn’t work. My mother’s told me that the kids at her school are already playing the system, and that’s only three months after its introduction. Disruptive students are now keeping personal scores on their visits to the Outroom. It’s a kind of status symbol with them, and more - it’s become a social occasion. Kids usually meet their own kind in the room and they then continue to fool about in the room.”

“Er, yes, that’s true. That can happen, yes,” Damian continued without a fluster. “But a judicious supervision timetable will eliminate any disciplinary problems from arising in the Time Out room.”

“You mean to say that we have to supervise the unruly kids some more?” asked Jane.

“Oh, yes, quite right. Why not? We must help these students with their problems,” replied Damian, drawing heavily on his cigarette.

The afternoon passed slowly. There were more discussions, in smaller groups and collectively. Then it was time for a committal. We all had to state openly whether we supported the system’s introduction into the school or whether we rejected it.

“I caned students at my first school,” I began, “until I realised that a couple of boys thrived on caning. They kept a detailed score of how many each had received since the beginning of the year. The one who had absorbed the higher number was the champion. I then changed tactics and never caned again. I merely talked to them, often for an hour. I think that helped to settle down my trouble makers. I’ve had real toughies in tears. You see, I simply recall my own misbehaviour at school. I received the strap - but that was a waste of time because it didn’t get at the root of misbehaviour. And that’s why I’m worried about the Glasser class expulsion becoming a substitute for the cane or the strap. It’s in effect a psychological canning because we are expelling the students from class. It is not helping to solve the student’s learning difficulties.”

“That’s quite right, Fredrick,” McCraw said. “That’s why we must all work together as a team to make this system work in our school. Students will begin to co-operate with us as soon as they see that they just won’t get away with disruptive behaviour.” Ray’s face lit up into a grin and he encouragingly nodded at his staff.

“And if it doesn’t work,” Robert Ferlazzo snapped supportively, “we’ll just revert to our present system.”

“That’s right,” Ray responded.
David Hatherell, who had nonchalantly watched the proceedings, became restless and sprang to life.

“I believe that we do not have a system at the moment, so we can’t go back to anything if the Glasser system fails. That’s why I reject it outright. We are coping with our students’ discipline, or lack

thereof, and we don't need a system like the Glasser proposal. Our children are no more vicious than children elsewhere. With a lot of understanding and with close parent-teacher contact, we'll overcome any serious disciplinary problems."

A general hush followed David's comment and no-one followed up on what he had just said. The principal's reason for having this seminar had just evaporated.

"Well, now, er…," Damian began, to break the silence. "When dealing with a conflict situation, it is important never to challenge the student. We should never ask the student why he or she is acting in a certain way."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Well, er … well, by asking a person to give a reason, we are putting them on the defensive. Students then have to justify their actions."

"I see nothing wrong with that" I replied. "Only in this way will a student develop critical self awareness. How else is a student to develop his brains? It's no good always asking students how they feel about things. We must ask them what they think. Don't we want to develop their minds? Or are we just out to develop their feelings?"

"Wait a bit, Fredrick, don't get excited. Let Damian finish his justification," McCraw interjected, eagerly assuming the role of arbiter.

"Well, yes, as I was saying. Yes, well, by asking the students to give a reason, we are actually creating unnecessary stress within that student," Damian continued.

"And what about teacher stress when a class is being interrupted by an unruly student?" Glenn chipped in.

"What we have to do is to focus on the actual undesirable form of behaviour." Damian continued without responding to Glenn's question. "We must offer the student a way out of a potentially threatening conflict situation. We don't want to compound matters by forcing him into a corner."

"Can you give us an example of how it should be done?" Mark asked.

"Well, yes, for example," Damian said, "if you find a student is causing a disruption in the classroom, then you can ask him the following question: 'What is that in aid of?' And the student's reply invariably is one which enables him to see the error of his way, without the teacher leaning too heavily on him. You can always ask a disruptive student whether he or she has completed the set task. If he says yes, then you inform him that other students must also be given the opportunity to finish their work, without him disturbing the whole class."

Ann-Marie looked puzzled. "Aren't we doing this already?" she asked impatiently.

"Er, yes, well, some of you would be doing this because you've had years of experience. But we are now looking at extreme disciplinary problems and how we can learn to control them so that meaningful learning can take place in the classroom. The Glasser system permits disruptive students to leave the room with dignity intact. The teacher does not have to become angry and there's no need to raise your voice any more. Verbal abuse is thereby eliminated and you, the teachers, retain a professional image. The student is merely asked to leave the room and settle down in another room, away from his mates,

outside of the classroom environment. And if a student manages to do that quite successfully, then he'll be allowed to return to the classroom."

"But that's rejecting difficult students," Karen Reid said with much heartfelt concern. "It is not our job to exclude anyone from the classroom. That's victimising students."

"Well, yes, that's right. Quite so," Damian continued. "That's the core of the problem which we are trying to solve with Glasser's help. The system teaches students that their actions will have positive consequences for them, consequences for which ultimately they must accept final responsibility."

Damian looked at David Hatherell. "You mean, then," David asked, "through the Glasser system we are offering students a chance of maturing at their own pace, without peer-group influence?"

"Well, yes, but we are offering them far more. By expelling them from the classroom, we are giving the teacher a breather from unnecessary stress. The potential of a very stressful conflict between student and teacher is thereby diffused. By expelling, no, let's use a different word … By sending a student into the Time Out room, we are helping the student to cool off and, ultimately, to learn to control his own behaviour, self-control in effect"

"And what about the students who play the system?" asked Mark eagerly. "what about the students who regularly meet in the Time Out room? How do they catch up on missed work? I wouldn't like them to come back into the classroom and have to catch up on missed work."

"Perhaps," Damian responded quickly, "we'll tackle that problem when we get to it."

'Surely we've reached that problem now." I asked, "otherwise we may as well go home. The voting for and against adoption of the system at this school hinges on an answer to Mark's question."

Restlessness and general weariness rippled through the seminarians. So far nothing new had been presented to them. Extremely disruptive students were already being sent out of the classroom, to front up at the office. This certainly had its desired effect on most students. It was important to make the event decisive. A trip to the office had to be a serious event. In the following year I had reason to send students Mark Ross and Charmaine Gurney to the office. They always returned with a smile because the principal smiled at them. He used to give them a telling off with a smile. That's what these students told their classmates. Also, Mark was on School Council where he had heard the principal tell Council members that I was quite an incompetent teacher.

"Well, er … yes. Quite right," Damian said rather sluggishly as if he was longing for a spell in the Time Out room himself, there to recover from self-induced stress. "Yes, we must consider all possibilities."

Most teachers had lost any interest in pursuing the topic any further. It was almost 3 PM and under normal conditions they would now be thinking of home-time. The final half-hour of school invited them to push for a quick ending to this seminar.

McCraw sensed the lacklustre mood of his staff. "Damian, I think we've ironed out a few difficult problems. Do you think we can now put the matter to a vote?"
"Well, yes, er … yes, that's fine by me." Damian said.

“Then,” continued McCraw, “we may as well ask each person to briefly state the reason why he or she is in favour or not in favour of our school adopting the Glasser system of discipline. David, will you begin, please?”

Hatherell visibly felt uncomfortable and blushed at being put in the number one position. He reached inside his jacket and retrieved a piece of paper. He unfolded it with shaking hands, then began reading. “I do not believe that the students at this school are vicious, certainly not any more vicious than at other state schools. I have taught at other schools and I actually think the kids at Goroke are quite good. It is wrong for us to assume that our students are vicious.” David paused, and he absorbed the silence that befell the meeting. McCraw sat in his chair gently stroking his beard and looking around the room with his customary frozen grin. Those who had come to know him knew that this was a sign of his displeasure. “Because of this,” David continued, “I believe that we should not waste our time learning something about a system of discipline, a system that has already discredited itself in a number of our schools. Certainly in the United States it has been shown to be a failure and only the other week I heard that Glasser himself had admitted that it was a failure. We can teach our students more by setting them a personal example. There’s no need to send them out the room. And if we have extremely disruptive students, then we must, as a staff, stick together and straighten students out. We do not need a system of discipline because the system would tie us down to some impersonal ritual, rules and regulations. We’re in the people business and that means we must convince students that their misbehaviour is no good. Also, the system would require us to get an extra time-table going because the Time Out room would need extra supervision. In any case, many students soon play the system, as Karen has pointed out to us. Reluctant students already refuse to co-operate and the Glasser system will not remedy this in any way.”

After a brief pause McCraw asked, “Who’s next?”

I volunteered my contribution. “As someone with an ethnic German background, I am loathe to adopt any kind of system which shies away from student-teacher interaction. We must not give up on our students, and that is what we’re doing when we send them of the classroom. We must wrestle with students, especially when they reach puberty. We cannot just cast them off, put them away into a Time Out room. Personal student-staff interaction must not be replaced by an anonymous disciplinary system. It is behind such a system that the manipulative educator hides, relinquishing his personal responsibility to a dead system. Teachers can scapegoat in such a system. If things don’t work out, then you can blame either the system or the student. You don’t have to reflect at all. That’s a bit too easy for me and it is also simplistic. Professionally we remain stunted if we use the system in the hope that it will do the work we should be doing.”

The small staffroom’s atmosphere had become uncomfortably tense. Two teachers had spoken against the motion of introducing the system. The principal had staked his reputation on its introduction. He had made it quite clear before the seminar began that he considered its introduction as the only hope of getting on top of unruly students. Now the time had come to put the day’s work to the vote and he looked worried.

“Now, let’s get on with it,” Ray said with a smile. “Anyone else wanting to say something before we put it to the vote?”

“Yes,” said Glenn, “I’d like to see us try the system. If it doesn’t work, then we can always throw it out again.”
“I second that,” John chipped in.

“I think we need such a system because it will help us help students with their disciplinary problems,” Robert said.

“I think we’ve gotta give the system a fair go. Jody and Charmaine need disciplining. This system might work where we fail.” Mark felt pleased with his stance and he sensed that his point had great merit.

“Yes,” said Bruce, “I think it’s a good idea to have such a system in the school. We can help disruptive students with their problems and we can even tell the parents about the program.”

“I think it’s a good idea,” said Val Bull with a nervous twitter.

“I’ve said my bit,” said Karen, “and I’m against it.”

Again there was a long uncomfortable silent pause.

“Well, anyone else with a comment before we put it tot the vote?” Ray’s grin had turned to ice. “OK let’s have an open show of hands. All in favour of Goroke adopting the Glasser system of discipline.”

Seven firm hands stabbed into the air and remained there for what seemed a long time. From the count it became immediately obvious that the motion had been lost, that the system would not be introduced into the school. McCraw knew this but still asked “And now all those who oppose the system’s introduction.” Eleven hands, some half-raised like those from the primary teachers Joan, Jess, Alice and Audrey. Others hovered in nondescript fashion, from Jane, Ann-Marie, Maree and Debbie. David, Karen and I had raised our hands in a powerful anti-salute.

“Well, that’s the result. Out of a total of 18 we have seven for and 11 against. It doesn’t worry me one bit,” Ray said, unconvincingly. He was visibly distressed by the result. “I’m not in the classroom, I don’t have to teach and handle the kids,” he said sarcastically. “You’ve made your choice and the school has to wear this decision. I did my best, Damian, and I’d like to thank you for putting so much work into this seminar.”

“Well, yes,” Damian responded. “Thank you for having me. If there is anyone who’d like to follow up this Glasser system with me at a later stage, don’t hesitate to visit me at Regional Office.”

As I walked home I wondered whether Glasser had not drowned himself in his own pain-pleasure model. What about the moral dimension as a source of volition? It certainly cannot be reduced to a simplistic hedonistic pain-pleasure model of reality. I could not understand why teachers were not to confront a student with the why question. Why not criticise students for their inappropriate behaviour? Students must have their own critical inclinations challenged. Make friends with the student and ask: What do you want? Is it against the rules? Don’t punish, yet don’t accept excuses! It just didn’t make sense to me. I relied on the old fashioned three f’s - firm, fair, friendly - in that order. Since the first day at school John Bell had reversed that order. He had asked the students to call him by his first name. This made him extremely popular with some students.

SIX THE LIE

Many teachers resigned from the government school system. Some managed to find a position within the private sector. Others merely thanked their lucky stars for having got out of the system in one piece. Still others joined the thousands of ex-teachers on stress-leave. These latter were a particularly sad group. Not coping with the system, they were now hounded by workcare. And still, central staffing officers worried little about the casualty rate. There was no need to worry because many more thousands of unemployed teachers waited for an opportunity to enter the system. Staffing officer, Gene Haugh, flustered about his office, telling anyone who cared to listen that his draw contained the names of three thousand potential teachers.

Staffing had devised a simple vetting system to ensure that unsuitable persons would not remain within the system. All teachers were initially appointed as emergency teachers. What these appointees didn't know was that schools which required emergency teachers usually had staffing problems. Emergency teachers were considered to be cannon fodder, expendable, to be sacrificed as scapegoats for a system in deep trouble. Gene Haugh came across my file in January 1983 and he made a notation:

"I don't think I can stand any more of Dr Toben.
He just won't lie down!!!"

Was this man suffering from a failure of nerves when he wrote this memo? What educational principles, values and ideals did he promote? What made this man tick? I was never to find out because he retired from the service some time in 1989.

The teaching profession is not immune from professional jealousy. The unions pushed hard to establish the equality principle where a teachers' personal qualifications did not matter. What mattered was an adherence to union ideology. It was some kind of vague social justice strategy intended to give cohesion to teaching staffs.

That is why an emergency teacher had to become a mini politician and make all the right noises to principal and colleagues - never mind whether this offended basic educational values. The cry went out that teachers had to get along with the prevailing union ideology, which was naturally incorporated into the directives on curriculum sent into the schools from Nauru House. There the henchmen worked hard, not for the Director-General at Treasury Place, but for the unions.

Once an emergency teacher had been assessed as suitable for temporary employment, his career within the system was usually guaranteed. Many temporary teachers taught within the system - some over twenty-five years - without ever applying for permanent officer status. This situation prevailed because permanency required contributions to the superannuation fund - and some teachers didn't want to do that. Val Bull, the farmer's wife, remained a temporary. My emergency transformation was made on 5 November, 1982, by the St Arnaud High School principal, Peter Schmidt, in the following words:

> "This is to state that Dr G F Toben has been on the staff of this school since July this year and has shown himself to be a competent teacher. He is developing a good teaching style, based on thorough preparation and correction, and has willingly participated in co-curricular activities. His relationship with students is developing and in his classes he demands a high standard of work and demeanour. As a staff member he has developed a good working relationship with the staff as a whole. He can be recommended for a temporary position."

During 1983 there were three teachers who applied for permanency: first-year-out teachers John Bell and Glenn Duncan, and a seasoned teacher, Fredrick Toben. Ray McCraw gave us all a favourable report - so it seemed. In my application form he stated:

> "I recommend this person be employed as a permanent teacher. He has a sound knowledge of teaching method and practice, knows his subject area, and relates well to the children. He has much to offer a school and his experience is apparent in his approach to his job."
>
> - R A McCraw 28.6.83

I wished to become a permanent member of the system because I could then apply for the permanent, classified English position at Goroke which no-one else really wanted. For me it was an ideal position. Glenn and John liked the idea of becoming permanents because Goroke was their first teaching appointment, and in these troubled times it paid to have job security. On the other hand, teachers like Val Bull didn't want permanency because of the super payment. Ironically, after my 1988-9 court case, many teachers fluttered into permanency. The case had legally disturbed the cushy arrangement that had benefited teachers such as Val. She became a permanent teacher but then had to move back to her old school, Edenhope High, where it was difficult to allocate her any meaningful duties.

A month passed without us hearing anything about our permanency application. A casual word to the principal elicited the response that the change of government, from Liberal to Labor, had held up the processing of applications. Duncan, who together with Bell, had submitted his application some time in April, also became restless about his application. And so a couple of weeks before the August holidays I asked McCraw point-blank "Ray, what's happening to my permanency application? Have you heard anything from staffing?"

"No, I've heard nothing from them," he responded with much expressed concern. "There could be a bit of a delay because of the political and economic situation. There may not be any permanencies granted this year. With Labor getting in, there are bound to be some major changes in the Department." Ray sounded so sincere and concerned about my well-being that I let it rest for a while. After all, the State Employees Retirement Benefit Fund had already begun to deduct superannuation payments from my salary. My wife was very happy about that. At last we had some financial security - something her father had never had.

A week before the end of Term II, I again approached the principal. "What's happening about my permanency, Ray?"

"Don't worry about it, Fredrick," he replied, smiling. "As I said to you before, with the change in government, we cannot expect any permanencies until 1984. There's a hold-up in the procedures."

"Why is that, Ray?" I asked.
"I believe it's an economic problem and they're not giving anyone permanency this year."

"That's strange," I said. "The State Superannuation Fund has accepted me as a member. That, at least, gives me much-needed security, and my wife is really happy about that."

Ray looked surprised. "Well, that's good," he said curtly. "And when you become a permanent member of the teaching service, you'll become a member of the teachers' super fund."

I left the temporary staffroom and walked into the muddy school grounds. I sensed that something was not in order. Nor were the school buildings and its ground. The oft-delayed renovation job on this tattered old school had begun in earnest. I temporarily forgot my personal problems and looked at the workmen tearing down the old buildings while we tried to teach. The noise was enough to unsettle any

teacher who attempted to do a good job. Chaos in the classroom, chaos outside the classroom! However, for the Goroke community this meant nothing but success. All this noise spelt the end of their long battle with the Melbourne bureaucracy. For over twenty years Goroke had fought for this to happen and for just as long the Melbourne education bureaucracy had resisted this project which had now begun in earnest.

* * *

The intoxicating roar of the footy crowd, anticipating that all-out brawl on the field, had lifted Bell's spirit. He himself had been in the under-20s Essendon side before a serious knee injury ended his dreams. Local selectors at Goroke had welcomed him with open arms in the hope that he would put some gutsiness into Goroke's team. They had organised a house to live in and they waited upon him hand and foot. For a temporary measure they even provided him with one of the selector's daughters. Yet Bell kept them in the dark about that serious knee injury. He led them to believe that he had come to Goroke to teach and to play football.

Now Glenn was standing beside this tall young man, silently observing his every move. Duncan had invited Bell to the Grand Final for two reasons. One was that he had a spare ticket and the other reason was that he would attempt to get to the bottom of the rumour about Bell's permanency.

"How are you sticking it out at school, John?" Duncan asked.

"Not bad, no, not bad at all, Glenn," he replied without looking at Duncan.

"Do you think you'll stay another year at the school?"

"Perhaps. I was lucky getting the social science position at the school. I was unemployed for two weeks before they called me to Goroke."

"Have you got your permanency yet, John?"

"Yes, Ray told me it would go ahead at the beginning of Term II."

"Gee, John, that's good," Duncan feigned pleasure.

And so the colleagues again fell into silence, more interested in the drama unfolding before their eyes on the MCG.

* * *

"Guess what?" Glenn gushed forth breathlessly as he rushed from his flat into our house. He had just returned from his weekend in Melbourne. "I don't believe it. I don't believe it. You know what?" he said, visibly shaking. "Bell's got his permanency. He told me yesterday at the footy. I asked him about it and he casually slipped out with it."

"That would mean McCraw was a liar," I responded in disbelief. "Surely we don't have a dishonest principal at this school?"
"Fancy him playing with our permanency like that. What a gall!" Glenn said. "I'll come over again after tea. We gotta talk about this some more."

"Yes, OK. The next step is to ask Ray about it," I replied.

That evening I could not smile at my wife and child. At the dinner table I muttered something about this whole permanency business being rather odd and unclear. “Never mind, dear,” Georgina said, “at least you’ve got the super cover. That gives the family some future security.” She was relieved about that because her father did not have that kind of security and this had put a strain on her parents’ relationship.

Later that evening Glenn came over for a game of chess. He had begun to teach me his style of chess, something I welcomed so that I could get away from my schoolboy games. Soon the permanency topic slipped into our conversation and we mulled over what Bell had told Duncan at the Grand Final.

“But Ray told me a couple of days ago that it was a political and economic matter, that no permanencies would be granted this year.” I protested.

“He told me the same thing,” Glenn responded.

“Then Ray McCraw has lied to both of you”, Georgina added. “That’s very bad.” It was said with deep conviction. My wife did not lie, never had and never would.

“I need a glass of heavy water, dear,” I said. “Will you join me, Glenn?”

“Yeah, why not. I need a little sustenance. This thing’s developing into something. I just can’t believe this - the principal lied to us, just like that.” Glenn drank his whisky slowly and purposefully, and he smiled mischievously. “You know what we’re going to do next term?”

“No,” I replied, “don’t keep me in suspense.”

“I’m going to teach you serious chess, every night until the end of the year. Interested?”

“Of course I’d be interested. It’ll keep our minds sharp. Something’s going on at school and we have to be prepared for anything. Chess and heavy water ought to keep us sane.”

“And what about Karl and me?” Georgina asked plaintively. “Aren’t you forgetting us? Are we not also involved in this whole business?”

“Of course, dear,” I replied rising from my lounge chair. “I’m doing this for the family. That’s the purpose of my life. I couldn’t be bothered doing this for myself - I’m just not ambitious enough for myself. A family has given me a purpose, and McCraw, it seems, is trying to stop me from establishing myself within this community.”

“One more game?” Glenn asked as I embraced my wife and son.

“OK, you go white.”

It was midnight before I was soundly beaten by Glenn’s practised hand.

SEVEN FIRST BLAST

Three weeks into Term III, the final school term for 1983, I had not heard anything from Staffing about my permanency application. John Bell's apparent no-fuss success bothered me and so I again asked McCraw about mine. "No, still nothing," he said with a reassuring smile. "I don't think anything'll come through this year. It's an economic thing, no permanencies this year."

"Ray, do you mind if I ring up Staffing for some more clarification?"

"Oh, Fredrick, I don't think that would be wise," Ray said in a soft, almost caressing tone. "They'll tell you the same thing."

"I'd still like to talk to Staffing. It'll put my mind at ease and I can tell my wife that I've done everything possible to hurry along this permanency of mine."

"OK, OK go ahead."

"Mind if I use your phone?" I asked. The only telephone available at the moment was sitting on Ray's office desk, just a metre away from me.

"You'll have to pay for the call," he blurted. "You realise this is not a business call involving the school, so you'll have to pay for it." He looked nervous and exhausted, and he stared at me. I took the step, lifted the receiver and began dialling. Ray had walked away from his desk to the back of his temporary office where most of the school's library books were stored. His lips had disappeared into his beard.

"Staffing, please," I said as the Department switchboard answered. I began to feel hot and sweaty.

"Name, number and school, please?" asked a soft voice.

"Who am I speaking to?"

"Caroline Coco."

I gave Caroline Coco the relevant information and she bade me wait for moment. "Yes, I've looked at your control card and your principal has deferred your permanency application."

"OK Miss Coco, thanks," I muttered and hung up the phone. In a daze I walked to Ray who was still hovering about near the bookshelves.

"Ray," I said, looking him directly in his eyes, "you lied to me about my permanency application. You've withdrawn your earlier recommendation."

"That's right," he said in almost joyful tone, perhaps pleased that his deception had come to an end.

"But you lied to me!" I quivered.

"No, I did not!"

"But you said that the permanency hold-up was an economic matter, a political matter."

“That’s right. It is!” he replied with raised voice.

“But you withdrew your original recommendation because my behaviour had changed?”

“That’s right!”
“But you lied to me. You didn’t tell me about it. You didn’t tell me that you weren’t happy with my teaching!” I said, almost in tears.

“That’s right,” he repeated like a robot.

“You lied to me, Ray!” I insisted.

“No I didn’t. I’m just not happy with your teaching. You’ll have to improve your performance. I’ve had parents and students complain to me about you.”

“Why didn’t you tell me all this before today, Ray?”

“Look, they’ve asked me to write another report in two months time.” Ray’s tone had become reconciliatory.

“But you’ve kept me dangling for two months. I’ve had no serious problems in my classes. To date all is well. Why should I be put under this kind of pressure again when John Bell, after only a few weeks, walks into his permanency with a smile?”

Ray looked sad, like a naughty child who had just been told off.

“Why did you do this to me, Ray? Why?”

Suddenly the naughty boy look transformed into a stare, as if something internal had prodded him into action. “I’ll tell you why I lied. If you want to join the system, then you’ll have to fit in. We’re all stuck with the same system. And I’m not sure whether your type is wanted in this system.”

He was now almost shouting at me and saliva began to show at the corner of his mouth. “You must conform to the system. You can’t get along with students, you can’t get along with staff members either. You’ve got to change and get along with everyone at this school.”

“But that’s not true, Ray, and you know it,” I added heatedly. “I’m quite well integrated at school. It takes time to establish yourself within any school and I think I’ve done that quite well here. I’ve certainly heard no complaints from parents or teachers, nor for that matter from students. You don’t take student complaints about hard work seriously, do you?”

“You project too much personality, and your Shakespeare lessons are inappropriate at this school. The Merchant of Venice is not a text I would give my Year 9 students. You know it’s anti-Semitic. Anyway, these students can’t understand this kind of old language. You’d be better off giving them something with a local appeal, like Boots and All.”

“Ray,” I said, almost smiling at myself, “we covered that play last term.” I couldn’t say any more at the moment. For eight months I had given of my best. Now, suddenly, this whole period had been assessed as a total waste of time. I had worked my students hard. I had not joined the school gossips, Val Bull and Julie-Ann Stehn. Nor did I intend to develop Stehn’s nervous laughter which had already infected Ray, Mark, Karen and Robert.

“Look, Fredrick,” Ray suddenly said in a conciliatory tone, “I’ll assess you again in two months time. Things will work out then. Make sure you have class control, and if you have any disciplinary problems, come and see me. I can help you.” He then turned from me and walked out the office.

That evening I had to comfort my frayed nerves with whisky. I felt so vulnerable. “Not fit for permanency,” I whispered to my wife. “I just don’t believe it. All these years of teaching, and now this. There must be another reason why he’s doing this to me.”

“I told you there was something wrong a couple of weeks ago when I saw Ray and Julie-Ann in the office on my way to giving the health lesson to Year 6. I told you that,” my wife said anxiously.

“But I didn’t do anything wrong,” I protested.

“Then why did the others change towards you?” she pressed.

“What do you mean, change? You can’t hold me responsible for some teachers being moody. I’ve worked hard on the radio station and I’ve involved all staff in the morning spot ‘Thought for the day’. Julie-Ann seems to enjoy recording these spots for me.”

“I don’t know either, dear,” my wife responded. “But you’ve got to promise me to fix it up.”

“Fix what up?” I again protested my innocence.

“I don’t know. But something’s gone wrong and you’ve got to get it right. You’ve got to do it. I don’t care how you do it.”

I was confused. How could I fix up something that wasn’t there to be fixed?

* * *

Ever since discovering the permanency lie I was intrigued by what McCraw had actually written to Staffing. In August 1985 I made a Freedom of Information request for a copy of this document, and I received a copy of the

“Deferment of Recommendation for Permanency

1.8.1983
Dear Ron
I request that you defer an application for Permanent Employment supported by me from a Dr Fredrick Toben.
Since supporting his application his behaviour at school has changed and several incidents have occurred which give me reason to doubt his suitability for employment. I wish to discuss these matters seriously with him and have time to observe any change he may make.
I request the deferment for 3 months until you can receive another report from me as to his suitability.
Yours faithfully
Ray A. McCraw, Princ.”

So, two years after the event, I began to search my soul and school diary to find out what had happened that had changed my behaviour enough to warrant McCraw’s about-turn on my suitability for permanent employment. Why did he have to lie to me about it? Why didn’t he have the courage to tell me face to face? If he didn’t have the courage to be open about such matters, how could he be trusted at all?

Did it stem from the night when I had seen McCraw and Robert Ferlazzo standing together at the fence separating their homes in Church Street? I'd had reason to visit Ray one evening after school and in the darkness I stumbled upon the two standing together apparently relieving themselves. A second glance stunned me into silence - instead of watering their horses, they were masturbating each other. They froze as I approached. Later a gate was placed in the aluminium fence to facilitate easier access, and some students in the know called it the 'poofter gate'.

The other matter concerned my July 1984 advertisement in *The Age* concerning the government's multicultural policy. McCraw and John Bell had seen the advertisement before school in the education supplement of *The Age*, and on that day I received nothing but ice from Ray. A snide remark from him charged me with sabotaging the government's multicultural policies. He was not interested in listening to my reason for placing the ad in the paper.

A further incident, where I witnessed McCraw slapping a child's bottom in a most indecent way, did not seem to matter to me at this point. McCraw's sexual confusion - his bisexuality - merely confirmed my suspicion that in this regard perverts within the teaching profession had a clear run, were in fact protected by the education bureaucracy.

* * *

During August and September the cold winter rains fade into fruitful spring showers. Mt. Arapiles still fascinates as it occasionally floats above the Wimmera Plains. It does this when a low strip of rain cloud cuts its base and lifts the mountain above the mist below. These rains are gold for the autumn-sown crops which now thirst for water as their shoots prod upwards through the blackish Wimmera soil. A gentle green carpeted sea emerges from the blackish soil and extends to the horizon.

The usually well-maintained school grounds could not retain their beauty during this major re-building process. Gardener, John Hodge, stood helplessly by as he watched his garden slowly being trampled beneath busy feet which carried away the dismantled old school buildings. The demolition job churned up well-paved footpaths, and vehicle traffic ripped up beautiful lawns. Students' shoes carried wet clay into the classrooms, much to the dismay of cleaners Vonny Ingram, Roma Sampson and Ruth Spehr. How could they continue to clean up the mess when every day brought in another load of dirt?

"This is your daily list," the principal sternly said to Ruth. "I want you to clean the mats, polish the linoleum, and vacuum the carpets without fail. It's got to be done every day. Do you understand me?"

Ruth muttered that she was doing just that and that Ray didn't have to remind her of her duties.

"Have I made myself clear?" he said sardonically, then left her standing in the corridor clutching his list of instructions.

Ruth said nothing, but she was to tell others about this incident. She had been doing her best under these trying, extraordinary conditions. It was difficult to keep the school looking spotless. Now with the duty list in her hand she knew what she had to do. Tomorrow she would hand Ray a letter of resignation.

* * *

School Council president, Kevin Johnson, had taken the afternoon off from work on his pig and sheep farm. Any excuse to come to his beloved school would do. He had been at the forefront of the

community's fight to get a new school complex. He now wished to nurture his dream into reality. He saw Ruth moping about the corridor polishing the lino.

"G'day, Ruth," he shouted in his customary uninhibited way. "How's it goin'?"

"Tomorrow I'm resigning from this job. I've had McCraw."

"Why, what did Whiskers do to you this time?" he asked her comfortingly.

"He's not happy with my work," Ruth replied, handing him the duty list.

"No problem, Ruth. I'll see him tomorrow morning. I think he's overstepped his mark on this matter. Just hold on to your resignation letter until I get back to you tomorrow." Sounding as cheerful as ever, Kevin briskly walked through the school grounds on his own private inspection-tour of the work that had been done so far.

As Kevin entered the office area, Julie-Ann smiled a massively false smile.

"How are you, Julie?" Kevin asked jovially. "Ray in?"

"Yes, I'll see if he has time to see you." She didn't have to call Ray because he had already heard Kevin's voice, and he was ready for some damage control.

"G'day, Kevin, come in and take a seat. What can I do for you?"

"Ray, let me get straight to the point. What's this about you not being happy with Ruth's cleaning?"

"She's a bit slack, Kevin. She's not cleaning the school well enough and if she values her job, she'll have to improve." Ray replied matter-of-factly.

"But shouldn't you be a bit considerate at this time of year? Look at the mess I'm bringing into your office!"

"There's no need for this kind of talk, Kevin. I'm well aware of the chaotic condition, but there's no excuse for slackness. Ruth's been slack. She's left her job early, and not just once."

"She told me about that," Kevin replied, "but she left early because she'd finished her cleaning. There was nothing else to do."

"There's always something to do in this place, Kevin. You know that."

"OK Ray, I just thought you should be a little considerate."

"Makes no difference, Kevin. The job's got to be done, wet or dry. That's all."

"Righto, Ray, must go, I hope the problem's cleared up."
"No problem, Kevin, no problem at all." He opened the door for Kevin. "We'll see you at Council meeting next Monday."

As the School Council president left the office area, Ray rushed to his secretary and burst out laughing. "Julie-Ann, did you smell that? God, he smells of pig shit. You'd think he'd clean up before coming here."

Julie-Ann twittered her usual hysterical notes, which continued as Val Bull entered the office area. She had heard Ray's outburst.

"You know Kevin's just about broke, don't you?" There was delight in her voice and she didn't intend to hide her glee at Kevin's possible demise.

"Well, I didn't know that," Ray said with obvious relish. "If he has to declare himself a bankrupt, then he'll have to resign from School Council and that wouldn't be bad, would it?"

"I think," Val gleefully added to her captive audience, "he's playing too much golf. It's the kids and his wife who feed the pigs and look after the sheep."

Ray smiled to himself. "How's it going with you in the library, Val?"

"All right, Ray. Margaret Sudholz left a bit of a mess though. It'll take me a while to get the place in order."

"Well, the library's in good hands now. I'm sure you'll get it back in working order." He then withdrew from the office area and made his way to the primary section of the school.

Very few people knew that he had pressured the former librarian to resign from her post so that Val could be moved out of the classroom. Val could not cope with a full teaching load anymore. Music lessons and library work were as much as she could manage. It was ideal to have her in the library where she could do no damage to the children.

Val repeated the Kevin Johnson story in the staffroom. Glenn had been listening to her gossip but he remained quiet and did not respond. Only a little while ago Kevin had told him about the coming celebrations for the opening of the new school complex, some time in December. But how, Glenn wondered, could that happen within a few weeks when the canteen wasn't even finished? Even John Hodge's beautifications had slowed down. Nothing happened according to timetabled projections.

"How's it going in art, Glenn?" Ray asked in a friendly, warm tone.

"OK Ray," he replied, not knowing whether Ray was baiting him. The ensuing silence was broken by Val, who felt the need to pass on her latest snippet of gossip. "Did you know that Kevin is slack at home? And talking of slack, did you know Ruth's getting married to one of the Burns?"

"That'll make a good hopeless couple," Ray smirked. "A real local mix," he sniggered, which was echoed by Val and, from the office area, by Julie-Ann. The approach of Chris, the school bell monitor, cut short any further gossip.

BOOK TWO PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY
EIGHT SHAKESPEARE'S COMPETENCE

I spent a wonderfully relaxing weekend at home with my wife and son. We pottered around the garden; I mowed the lawns while Karl followed my tracks pushing an old doll's pram which he had received from the McCraw's daughter, Kirstin. It was great fun for Karl to run alongside me, yelping for joy as he pushed along his make-believe lawnmower. Georgina watched happily from behind the old rosebushes which had been neglected for some years.

"Don't you think you ought to ask Ray to clarify your supposed teaching problems?" my wife asked me during our afternoon tea break.

"I'll do just that tomorrow sometime," I responded. I had been thinking about this matter as well, and it seemed sensible for me to approach the principal again.

It was not to be a pleasant experience.

"If you wish to join the Department, you'll have to fit into the system. It's as simple as that - conform or get out," he angrily snapped at me from his office desk.

"Look, Ray," I insisted, "I'll certainly accept and submit to pressure to perform. That's fulfilling my duty towards parents and students. But I can't accept this pressure to conform. We can't just accept the lowest common denominator as determining the standard of instruction at school. How can we be called true educators if we demand such conformity? You know as well as I do that the system is in trouble, that basic standards have not risen. During the 60s our Matriculation examination was not recognised by European education authorities. Our present Higher School Certificate suffers a similar fate. Let's not fool ourselves, Ray, but we must push up standards."

Ray became angry and in a raised voice said, "I'm not going to discuss this matter any further. I've told you, I'll review the situation in a few weeks time. Anyway," he added as an afterthought, "I'm not sure whether I want you at this school for five years."

This final remark neutralised me, and it also made me feel very sad for Ray. It was useless to respond. His mind-set was based on a dislike for me as a person.

I left Ray's office rather numbed because I had taken his earlier criticism to heart. Now I knew that the real reason for his displeasure rested on a personality conflict. That evening I won the second of three games of chess with Duncan. I was really pleased with my progress but I felt disturbed by Duncan's response to my success. He became agitated and tears welled up in his eyes. "I didn't see the knight slipping into check-mate," he said in high-pitched strained voice.

"Bad luck, mate," I exclaimed. "Only I'm sure you let me win this game."

"No, I never let anyone win on purpose. I just didn't see it. I'm tired now. The kids at school were too noisy and Ray kept coming into my classes all day. That didn't help matters."

"I wonder when he's going to stop this nonsense. He's begun to walk into my classes as well," I said. "I've also got other teachers coming into my classroom. Robert, Mark and Karen are also regular visitors. They come in asking students for work, or they come in to make some trivial announcement about school sport. I wonder whether Ray's priming them for this."

“What about Mark’s own class problems?” Glenn asked.
“Well, I’ve mentioned that to Ray but all he says is that Weegberg’s a permanent teacher and therefore it doesn’t matter.”

“That proves that he’s picking on us,” Glenn said hastily.

“I suppose he’s hopping into us because we threw out his beloved Glasser system of discipline.”

“But I voted for its introduction,” Glenn said. “Don’t you remember? I was one of the ones who supported its introduction.”

“In that case,” I said, “he should be supporting you rather than making it more difficult for you to grow into your job.”

“No matter what I do,” Glenn continued, “it’s as if he’s feeding on my inexperience. I’m still hesitant in handing out punishment to students. He takes that as proof of my not being able to handle the kids. Anyway, what can we do to the kids? And they know it! Only support from the top stops classroom nonsense.”

“And that’s where our problems begin, Glenn. Perhaps we would give up this idea of being teachers. We need to become manipulators in order to survive in the classroom. Just swim along in the stream and don’t rock the boat and just say yes amen to everything Ray tells us.”

“I’m not creating any waves,” protested Glenn, “and still he’s singled me out for his special attention.”

“You know he’s blasted me over that process writing business,” I added sympathetically. “It’s supposed to be a brand new method of teaching students how to write more creatively and effectively. I’ve been doing this kind of stuff for years and I told him so. There’s just one difference between my approach and his new method. I still rigorously mark student’s written work for errors. He just didn’t want to hear about all this and instead handed me a couple of books. When I asked him to discuss the matter with me he told me he didn’t have the time for that right now. Twice I’ve been back and he was still too busy to discuss process writing with me.”

“Force him into a check situation,” Glenn remarked light-heartedly.

“I’ve tried that. He then changes tack and tells me that I can’t get along with students. He holds me responsible for the poor quality work from some of my students like Brad.”

“He said the same thing to me,” Glenn said. “He told me that I had failed to change the students’ negative attitude to work. When I reminded him that most of my students have a good attitude in art classes, he stormed out of the room.”

“Ray’s got a strong will, hasn’t he?”

“Yes,” Glenn agreed. “But I don’t share his values and that’s why I don’t want to get involved with him on anything. He twists and turns things, then blames me if things aren’t working out his way.”

“It seems to me that he’s simply groping from one incident or event to another without ever acting on a principle or an ideal. He’s learning from us without admitting this to us. He pretends he knows when he doesn’t know. He’s not being honest with himself. It’s a problem, Glenn. I wonder how it will all end.”*

* * *

My Year 9 Shakespeare lessons created uproar throughout the school. I was helped along by the power of the media. '60 Minutes' had screened a program about William Shakespeare's doubtful authorship of his works. After the Sunday evening screening a few students approached me the following Monday. Gleefully they told me that I was wasting their time in studying any of Shakespeare's works, because "60 Minutes said Shakespeare's not even real."

"It's dumb," said Brad. "Even Mr Ferlazzo, Mr Bell and Mr Weegberg agree. They told us that it's a waste of time studying Shakespeare."

"It doesn't really matter who wrote the plays, Brad," I replied. "What matters is that through a reading of the plays we are opening ourselves to some of the finest literature ever written. There's beauty in the language, and it can still lift our spirits, no matter who wrote it."

I was surprised how virulent the anti-Shakespeare streak was within some students. The principal's own attitude didn't help matters either. Year 9 student Mark Ross sneered that "Even Mr McCraw thinks it's a waste of time studying Shakespeare. We can get along in life without knowing his plays."

"Certainly, Mark," I said in agreement, "but we ought to know something about our heritage, about our literature. It helps us understand ourselves and others. 'The Merchant of Venice' teaches us about tolerance."

"But it's all old-fashioned language and that," Mark continued.

"That's why we're studying his dramas, so that you don't have to complain about not understanding the language. That's the purpose of this lesson, to show you a world beyond your present understanding."

"You're just crapping on, as usual," Mark muttered to himself, literally being saved by the bell from any further mind-extending discussion.

At recess, Year 8s Andrew Mann and Richie Loft came to me rather deflated. "Sir," Richie said, "we've just heard that Mr Bell, Mr Ferlazzo and Mr Weegberg have told their classes that you're nuts teaching us Shakespeare."

"Thanks for telling me, boys. I just want to make sure that you pass through my class knowing something about Shakespeare. Later in life you'll meet people who freeze up when you mention the name Shakespeare because they didn't learn anything about him during their school days."

The boys walked off light-heartedly. But I was bothered. How could teachers talk like that to their students? None of them were English teachers. I could now understand why some English teachers threw in the towel and permitted their students to play games and crossword puzzles. The battle was not so much with unwilling students as with other teachers who themselves had not been exposed to our literary masters.

During 1983 Jane Wilkinson tried without much success to do something with some of her Year 11 students who had parked themselves at the school before becoming housewives. It always amazed me how a farming community accepted it as proper for their girls to continue their education beyond Year 10, while it was frowned upon for boys to complete school. Often farmer's wives had more formal education than their husbands. Many wives themselves had been bank employees, nurses or teachers.

Jane's Year 7 French classes during 1982 also fell by the wayside during 1983. The principal cited lack of "demand" as a reason for not offering French to the community. Nine years later the school was given an Italian teacher as part of an effort to expose primary and post-primary students to a foreign language. In the meantime a whole generation of students was to pass through the school without encountering another language. These students would later raise a family, send their offspring to school and feel inadequate as their children told them of the foreign language they were learning at school.

The learning atmosphere became more depressing and stifling. It seemed to me as if Ray McCraw didn't like cultural matters. That he was an extremely crude fellow didn't bother me. I'd met rough nuts on my peregrinations around the globe and some of them had written excellent poetry. McCraw seemed to wish to deprive youngsters of the opportunity of being exposed to what he derisively called high culture. He felt that this would stress them too much, that the kids at school needed to be protected from such challenging work. Worse of all, he let it be known that they weren't really up to coping with such work. He considered mind expansion akin to torture.

NINE EARLY RETIREMENT

Jess Batson had been teaching at the Goroke school for over thirty years and her presence there had become an institution. Everyone in the town and surrounding district knew Miss Batson, the tall, thin spinster who had taught three generations of their students. Her total self control manifested itself in her slow but firm speech. Only rarely was it possible to see a sparkle of spontaneity slipping out. She would take that extra breath half-way through a word, an almost imperceptible gulp. Strangely, when she and Joyce Packer played tennis the pair was known as "Hit and Giggle" because that is exactly what they did.

Jess had been in charge of upper primary students for a long time. She had also filled the role of primary vice principal. She commanded great respect from all, all except Ray McCraw, the new principal at Goroke Consolidated School. Her classes were a model for any new teacher and anyone who walked past her classroom could feel the learning atmosphere and sense the enthusiasm of the students. But McCraw wished to get rid of her. He called her "dead wood". Never mind her good work in the classroom and never mind her many years of service and never mind her upholding a school tradition that spanned three generations.

When McCraw mentioned this to School Council President, Kevin Johnson, it struck a chord within the president. Johnson wished to know more about McCraw's dissatisfaction with Jess's teaching performance.

"You see, Kevin," Ray began in silken voice, "Jess and Audrey have been here too long. They're old and set in their ways. Education needs fresh blood. We have new and exciting things happening in education and these teachers can't change their ways and they don't understand kids anymore."

"You mean you can't teach new tricks to an old dog?" asked farmer Kevin.

"Sort of," replied McCraw. "With a younger staff I'll get more work done and that'll be better for the kids. All kids respond better to younger teachers. Joan Oliver will also have to go. She's not much use. She talks too much."

"I don't know about that, Ray," Kevin responded firmly. "My son, Shane, seems to be getting along well with Joan, and you know what a pain he can be."

"Joan talks too much," Ray snapped. "She's not listening to my instructions. I gave her a job to do and she still hasn't finished writing up her new syllabus."

Kevin didn't feel like getting into a longer discussion with McCraw. "I've got to be off now, Ray. I'll leave these staffing problems to you. You're the expert."

* * *

When Jess Batson didn't return to school after the term holidays, Ray told his staff that Jess was suffering from a serious back problem. "She's had this problem for many years. Perhaps she's been riding horses for too long."

A relieving teacher, Monica Sonego, was brought in. She welcomed the $100 a day because it helped to supplement her husband's declining farming income. Monica also wished to send her daughter to private college in Hamilton and that would cost a lot of money.

And so Jess Batson had gone on official sick leave, indefinite sick leave. A year later Ray informed his staff that Jess had been promoted to principal of Nhill primary school, a duty she would, unfortunately, never carry out. The promotion brought her into a higher superannuation bracket. That was all. She never returned to teaching duties. In fact, soon after announcing her promotion, Ray informed the school that Jess was going into well-deserved retirement. A notice to this effect was placed in the local paper, the 'Free Press'. A farewell morning tea was also arranged for her at the school. At the gathering some colleagues were moved to tears. Ray eloquently praised her sense of duty and devotion to the job. Regional Office sent out a representative who also waxed on about Jess's honour. Some older colleagues mused to themselves at the hypocrisy of it all.

Joan Oliver didn't escape McCraw's clutches so graciously and rewardingly. She was a down-to-earth grandmother who had little time for Ray McCraw's "bull shit". She did not shy away from giving youngsters in her classroom a well deserved clip. She had raised her own children on an isolated farm and then she had returned to teaching. Like Jess, Joan had worked under a few principals. She knew how to adapt to changing circumstances but she couldn't tolerate change for change's sake.

"Joan," Ray snapped at her, "I want you to follow the guidelines which I wrote up for you. I don't want you to follow your own outline." Ray's anger showed and this upset Joan.

"But, Ray," she began, "I've got the program from ten years ago. It's just the same, Ray. What is the sense in changing something that works?" Joan was honest and sincere in her worry.

"It's outdated and you'll have to adapt to the new conditions and methods," he replied in raised voice.

"What guarantee have I, Ray," she continued to probe, "that you won't ask me to change again to another method after I prepare the syllabus according to your guidelines? You did that with my other one last year, in 1982."

"What do you mean, Joan?" he asked indignantly.

"Well, you gave me the English language course last year and now this year you've asked me to do another one, and the present one is the one I've been following since before you came to this school."

Ray was furious with Joan. She had caught him out playing his own game, only she was wiser than McCraw. "I won't have you questioning my authority, Joan. I won't stand for that," he almost shouted. "You do as I tell you or I'll have you re-assessed."

With this threat still ringing in her ear, Joan watched McCraw stomp out of her classroom. She was shattered. Only a year ago, Senior Education Officer John Nunn, then still a school inspector, had declared her to be suitable for a principal's position. No-one could take that away from her. But during 1983 the teachers' unions had succeeded in abolishing the Victorian state education inspectorate. From now on evaluation of teachers was to be conducted according to the The-Union Agreement, a farcical document which had little to do with teacher evaluation and all to do with ensuring that the unions' education ideology remained secure within the state system of education. From 1983 onwards until Labor lost office this perverse ideology infested the state system

The following day McCraw again entered Joan's classroom. "Joan, I want you to set your class some work," he snapped at her. "I want to discuss the maths program with you."

He swiftly seated himself at her desk and continued "We must keep up to date with what's going on in maths. Let me have a look at what you've prepared."

Resigning herself to another useless session with McCraw, Joan began to collect her material for his perusal. Suddenly she heard a mighty shriek come from her desk. "What's this, Joan," McCraw shouted at the top of his voice, as her class froze in fright.

"What's this? This work is nonsense. If you can't do it my way, then you'll just have to leave the school." He closed a folder, rose from her chair and strutted out of her classroom. For the remainder of the lesson the class maintained absolute silence. The students sensed that something terrible had happened to their teacher. This Grade 5 which was usually a lively bunch of children had been turned into a stunned group of young adults. Joan felt ill and she wanted to run to the toilet because her head had begun to spin. Then Alice Black, the Grade 4 teacher next door entered the room. Without a word she walked up to Joan, who was standing at the front of the classroom, held her by the arm, then softly said "Joan, I'll look after your class. Have a break."

Within a few weeks Joan Oliver had applied for a transfer to Apsley Primary School. Two years before her retirement she left the school which had been her home for many years. The official version of events stated that Joan's daughter-in-law, Maree Oliver, had been declared in excess and that she would have to leave Goroke. Joan took the opportunity of giving her daughter-in-law the opportunity of remaining at the school under McCraw. The move to Apsley was thus a voluntary transfer. Maree got along well with Julie-Ann, the school secretary. She in turn got along well with Ray McCraw.

Other teachers in the know were aware of the McCraw-Oliver conflict which had Joan on sedatives. She attributed her partial breakdown to McCraw's questioning her teaching competence.. On countless occasions in the staffroom he had told other teachers that "Joan is an old, ineffective teacher who talks too much."

And so, gradually McCraw had poisoned her well. She had responded to this poisoning process by asking John Nunn for a transfer. He had actually made this 'valuable' suggestion to her when she fled to him for advice. On her second last day at the Goroke School, Joan told McCraw a few home truths.

"Ray, you're a liar. It's not true that I'm not doing my job properly. I followed your instructions, but then you changed them overnight. That's why I can't accept your instructions. And look at these work programs. See! You're the one who is confused."

Ray did not respond to Joan's charges and he walked away from her in silence. This time the room was empty. He had no answer for her because Joan had irrefutable evidence - in writing - to prove that she was right.

I had learned a lot from Joan Oliver. Once a week I would spend an afternoon in her classroom, observing her language work. We developed a good routine, until the blow-up with McCraw. Then my regular journeys into her classroom ceased and I stopped teaching her Year 5 class that weekly language lesson.

Like all good teachers Joan had been doing process writing ever since she had begun to teach youngsters the art of reading and writing. Then the elements of the writing process were called planning, rough copy, revision, good copy. Any teacher of English was familiar with these basic steps. Process writing followed along similar lines except that it incorporated the idea of 'creative spelling'. This was educationally quite an irresponsible step to take and Joan and I vigorously opposed it at school. We let it be known that students had to worry about their spelling. We argued that so called modern literacy programs which liberated students from the constraints of correct grammar and spelling actually increased student illiteracy. By encouraging kids to 'publish' their written work, often

a badly illustrated piece of poor writing, we were merely pandering to an infantile intellect. Students themselves knew when a piece of writing was good, mediocre or bad. Teachers lost credibility by letting nonsense pass as worthy creative exercises.

McCraw would have none of our argument. He swallowed the process writing ideology with enthusiasm, as a contact point, as a conversation starter. Joan and I both agreed that these innovative writing programs proved fatal for student morale. They did not challenge or extend a student's writing ability because the philosophy behind the approach was to entertain. Everything was supposed to be fun and full of enjoyment. That's not what writing is all about. Nor is it a breeze for any student to learn how to think.

The principal's wrath was not only felt by Joan. Audrey McLean, another long-serving primary teacher, taught Preps just across from Joan's room. I also regularly visited her classes. These were a delight for me. Here we had youngsters exposed to the foundations of the life-long education process.

Audrey, a corpulent woman, fell foul of McCraw the following year. He put her on sports duty. When School Council President, Edwin Mitchell, protested to the Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations, Jim Betson, Audrey was taken off sports duty. But McCraw had created the desired effect. Audrey did not return to school during at the beginning of 1985. Instead, she took a year of sick leave, then in the following year retired from the teaching service.

The only local teacher to survive the McCraw clean-out was Val Bull. She had been on the hit list during 1983, when she was taken out of the classroom because her English lessons had turned into nonsense lessons. Instead, she had been allocated Margaret Sudholz's librarian position. Margaret, the wife of prominent Goroke citizen John Sudholz, disturbed McCraw's sense of propriety. The Sudholz's, of course, were of German pioneering stock. Originally following the Lutheran faith, Margaret and John had joined Jess's Anglican church. McCraw didn't have much time for organised religion, especially for the Lutherans who embodied a firmness of belief not found in the other denominations. Most Lutherans were also of German origin and that didn't help them endear them to those people who still harboured anti-German feelings.

"Margaret Sudholz didn't really know much about library work, did she?" Ray asked Val.

"Oh," said Val, warming up for a long gossip session, "she was always busy in the library but she never got on top of her work. It's still in a mess and it'll take me quite some time to get it back in order." And so Val continued to bucket Margaret Sudholz.

Once, when Val minded a library class a student asked her a basic question about cataloguing to which she had no ready answer. "I'm amazed," she said to the student, "how some students don't know when not to ask questions. Can't you see I'm busy with other things now?"

Another time a students asked her a language question, and she again tried to brush him off with this ploy. "But please, Mrs Bull," Chris insisted, "why is it that we have this different pronunciation of 'chance' and 'dance'?"
"There are some people who haven't had the good fortune of benefiting from a good education, Chris," she said.

"Isn't this school giving us a good education?" he continued.

"Don't be rude, Chris, and just get on with your work," was her reply. She didn't feel like elaborating on matters she took for granted. Val had lived in the district for many years and as a farmer's wife she

considered herself to be quite a socialite. She attended both the Anglican and Catholic church services at Goroke. At both churches she would serenade the congregation with her guitar and her not-unattractive singing voice.

I was surprised to hear McCraw talking in the staffroom about Val's slackness in the library. I wondered then whether I should tell her about this gossip behind her back. But I never did because I found it too tiring to follow the gossip shop at school. I had more important things to do and think about. I was flat-out with my own classwork. One basic task facing any English teacher is regularly wading through daily and weekly written exercises which need to be marked and assessed.

TEN SEE THE BOSS

The plight of the reluctant learner equalled that of the problem learner. Only a few dedicated teachers bothered with either of them. However, as in all matters there is an exception. And so it was at Goroke where an unwritten law proclaimed that the amount of time spent with under-performing students was proportional to the strength of their parents' social profile. This in turn was determined by one factor only, the size of their bank account.

Some teachers uneasily embraced an educational philosophy which celebrated materialism. Others would obfuscate such a view by spouting forth socialistic rhetoric. Yet deep down they lusted for money, and they lusted for people who had money.

Some of the teachers at Goroke were educational confidence tricksters. School problems were evaluated from the perspective of social class, even though most teachers had themselves had emerged from a so-called lower class. It surprised me to learn that we had two illiterate students at the school, Barbara Anton and David Lees. Both suffered from, among other things, dyslexia. I tried to point out that this dyslexia was actually a result of faulty teaching. An ideology which equates learning our alphabet with learning Chinese ideographs naturally does not admit responsibility or blame.

So it was not surprising for me to be rejected by McCraw when I told him that we would have to begin from scratch with Barbara and David, teaching them the sounds of the alphabet in the hope that they would stop relying on remembering visual cues. McCraw was not impressed. And he laughed at me when I said I could teach any illiterate person to be literate, provided there was nothing physiologically wrong with them. Not surprisingly, then, the half-hearted remedial program at school was little more than child-minding.

During 1984 McCraw made our Social Science teacher the guru of Process Writing. Bell had been instructed to sell this 'new teaching method' as a way of enhancing students' creative writing prowess. His small group soon realised that behind the new name was just another ineffective remedial English class. They then felt cheated and became once again despondent, disillusioned with a system which had failed them.

Barbara came from a so called socially disadvantaged home background. Her parents toiled as professional timber cutters. Their four children were often left unattended at nights, sleeping in a caravan. When their parents arrived home at night, they were usually too tired to supervise any homework. The Antons belonged to a generation which believed that schooling was a teacher's job, not to be passed on to parents. After all, how many working parents had the time needed to hear their children read a book to them? For the Antons it was enough to entrust their children to the care of the Goroke school where, so they believed, the teachers would care for them.

David's parents owned Maryvale Station. Not until the end of 1983 did I discover that he was totally illiterate. Mark Weegberg had set him a Year 11 Consumer Education test. For some reason Mark had been called away from his invigilation task and he asked me to continue the supervision. I was stunned by David's moans and groans as he attempted to grapple with the task of reading the question paper. Worse was to come for him as he tried to write down an answer to each question. What cruelty it was to have David sitting in the model office room pretending he could complete the set task. I wondered then what made people like Weegberg tick. Why should David be humiliated like that? It served no purpose at all. The examination paper would contain nothing worthwhile, unless indecipherable script is worth an effort mark!

David's literacy problem was never mentioned at staff meetings. He was always treated as a promising student who tried his best. Barbara, on the other hand, became the butt of McCraw's vicious jokes. She was classified as a hopeless case. It was all a matter of the parents' social status.

I did not care about a student's social background. My job was to teach all those who entered my classroom.

"That's also your approach, isn't it, Glenn?" I said. "You don't care about a student's social background, do you?"

"Of course not," he replied. "I have no favourites either. In art you can't have favourites because you tend to respond to a student's work rather than the person. The work tells you how much effort a student has put into it. Even an otherwise hopeless case can develop talents which produce pleasing results."

The staffroom wasn't quite empty as we talked. Julie-Ann Stehn and Marie Oliver still sat at the table sipping cups of tea. They were talking softly, and because Glenn and I spoke openly they could follow our conversation without too much difficulty.

"I feel the same way about Duanne Blythman," I added. "His language work could really be thoughtful and polished. But he's been branded a trouble-maker because he just can't stand the principal. Duanne's no-money and no-social-status situation doesn't help him either."

"His mother told me," Glenn said, warming to the topic, "that Duanne is challenging the teachers to teach him something, instead of entertaining him in class."

"Quite right. By challenging his teachers he's simply exposing them to their own limitations. He can see through their bluff, then has the nerve to demand the teachers work harder in class. Quite a boy. I've never had any problems with him."

As we were about to quit the staffroom I heard David Hatherell shout at someone: "You get that bin and pick up all the papers. Where? Around the school oval, all over the school. Now, get to it."

I shook my head. "This won't break his spirit. It may humiliate him but it won't break his spirit. He'll continue to challenge his teachers, and why not? Glenn, tell me of anyone who isn't challenging, at one time or another?"

"Do you seriously expect me to answer this question?" Glenn said with a knowing smile.

"Well, your reply would give me the opportunity to develop this a little further. I would like to think that I wasn't really challenging anyone except myself."

Duanne's problems with the teachers highlighted what McCraw enjoyed most, replicating Goroke community's social pecking order within the school. That's not a difficult task in a small town like Goroke. Social structures are often transparent, delineated between the haves and the have-nots. McCraw slotted himself into the establishment and anyone he didn't like was classified as the 'others' or 'them', as distinct from 'us'.

Duanne didn't fit into the establishment mould like David Lees. His parents were on welfare and didn't have the social clout to defend him. Hence, he was fair game. It was easy for McCraw to push this dynamic and physically fit young man to his mental limits and cause him to buck the system, thereby

providing more fuel for the staff's gossip shop. The principal had developed a fine art of setting up students he didn't like, then knock them down with a smiling face. Words of sincere concern flowed from his lips, he only wished to help his victims to better themselves, to help them overcome their disadvantage.

In September 1983 the Director General of Education, Dr Norman Curry, wrote a letter to *The Age* wherein he celebrated the Department's new disciplinary policy:

The main thrust of this new approach is to encourage each school to develop its own policy on student discipline within the guidelines provided, and thus to involve parents, teachers and students in a co-operative endeavour which reflects the views of that school and will thus be more readily accepted by all.

I have seen the report of each of the inquiries when students have been suspended and have been impressed by the concern shown by the staff of the school in dealing with difficult situations, the care taken by the members of the inquiry to find a solution in the interests of the school and of the individual student, and in most cases the readiness of a school to accept the student who has been suspended and give this young person a chance to start in a new way.

Our schools would be unfortunate places if we did not provide the chance for a student to redeem herself or himself by being given another chance to succeed.

All schools received, many weeks ago, a full copy of the regulation relating to student discipline and a set of departmental instructions related to the regulation. There has been no change in the regulation or the instructions.

We have a responsibility to all children in our schools first, to ensure that the majority of those who wish to continue their studies without disruption are able to do so and that the tiny minority of students who do disturb others are not permitted to continue to do so, and second, to find an answer to the problems faced by that tiny minority.

It is not for us to condemn without endeavouring to find some solution. One part of this is to ensure that the student is fully occupied during any suspension and it is for this reason that the school is asked to provide work to be undertaken.

There has been a proper attempt to involve parents immediately there are signs of serious difficulty in a student's behaviour. If the parents show no interest in this, and this would be a strange occurrence, the school would not be prohibited from taking further action.

The present procedures relating to student discipline were recommended to the Minister by a group which consisted of parents, teachers, principals and specialist departmental staff. In no way are they anti-teacher in tone or in practice. They recognise that through co-operation between schools and parents more will be achieved for all students.

NORMAN G. CURRY,
Melbourne

Very few people knew that this same man would have problems dealing with teacher discipline. One English teacher, whom police had charged with possession and trafficking of drugs, had to front up in Dr Curry's office. In the presence of a VSTA official, the two talked about everything except drugs. It was a jovial and compassionate discussion. And that was the end of the matter. The following day the teacher was back at his school carrying on his usual trade, teaching and consuming and distributing drugs.

The unofficial 1983 Goroke Consolidated School's disciplinary file contained some gems which, however, all too often indicated the ordinariness of disciplinary problems at the school:

Period 3

Steven Ross asked to hand out books to class; as he walked past Charmaine Gurney she snatched a book off him causing him to drop the books. When I spoke to her, she refused to answer the simple question "what behaviour was in aid of". For the rest of the period she was sullen and looking for an antagonist.

Barbara Anton/Charmaine Gurney, fighting in corridor. Witness Karen Reid. Neither admitted guilt, neither repentant.

Ann was working on her own special maths. Took up where Jodie left off with rude comments to the boys. Can't remember it all, things like this maths is "stuffed up". Went wrong and said "Fuck it". Told me the boys were talking about tits. When I told her I had never heard girls using such rude language before she laughed loudly and said something like "Oh girls we must be posh". I really feel she does it to impress Jodie, they are great mates and Jodie is the leader. Ann told next offence will mean suspension.

A seed pod was thrown at Deanne Blythman, hitting her in the head, lump and bruise resulted at hairline level. Ian Nuzum and Stephen Lyall suspected. Both denied it.

What happened, when I was in maths today Mr Ferlazzo was handing out the tests and I called Suzie a mole because she had been irritating me all day when she said something about her mark. Fucking Foulmouth, heard by RAF, directly from I.N.

Ian Nuzum, swearing, large 'F' (after being told to sit in corner after talking too much) Ray suspended from class for two weeks, parents up on next offence.

One of the first letters concerning discipline was written by the principal about four months after he assumed his position at Goroke:

Dear

… were withdrawn from the cross country because, as a group running together, they showed a conspicuous lack of effort in an attempt to gain recognition from other children. As a result, I have withdrawn them from the school's P.E. and sports program for five weeks, 2 weeks of P.E. and 3 weeks of competitive sport which will begin in approximately four weeks time. During this time they will work on Written Expression and Mathematics under my supervision. I will report their standard of work to you at the end of this time.

R.A. McCraw.

This was typical of McCraw's response to perceived disciplinary problems with secondary students. He feared their physical strength and thus had to rely on bluff. Unfortunately bluffing your way through a sticky situation may succeed once, but never a second time. Children are too perceptive. They can tell whether a teacher is sincerely worried about their poor behaviour. A similarly distorted image emerges through the following report written up by Mark Weegberg:

10.8.83
Re: Ian Nuzum

In period one today I arrived on time to Social Science. For most of the period Ian read and did the work required of him. At the end of the period when students were packing up I asked them to please leave their Social Science books so that I could mark them. Ian said that he was just starting a new one. I replied that I would still like to see the book he has used for the first two terms, even if the dog had chewed it. To this Ian replied "Well you can go and get fucked. I have had enough of this place." I asked him to stop, but he was not interested by this stage and muttered something about going and asking mum. He started to leave and for the first time I raised my voice and told him to stay and he again told me to get fucked. I told him that I did not have to be talked to that way and he had better go and tell Mr McCraw what he had just told me, then he left. This was not the result of a confrontation at all, in fact I get the strong impression that Ian came to school with the intention of doing something that would get him into trouble…
M.A.Weegberg

My personal experience with Ian Nuzum revealed a different aspect of his character. I had an occasion to supervise the Year 10 class when Ian told me that "you piss me off". I immediately confronted him. I asked whether that was a nice thing to say and told him that I expected him to apologise to me. For twenty minutes I talked to him, in front of the class, then he apologised and I shook his hand. Later I mentioned this incident to McCraw and he nearly fainted. He felt it could have escalated into a nasty situation. I disagreed with his analysis because I, too, had had extensive experience, which included caning students for misbehaviour. McCraw insisted that I had mishandled the situation. I then reminded him of an earlier comment of his about having been frightened of secondary students at Timboon Consolidated School. The principal gave me an angry look, then silently walked away.

The Blythman and Nuzum families were not the only ones to feel the wrath of McCraw in the form of staffroom gossip. There were three other families which had also lost the social battle with him: Cox, Anton and Lyall. Another newcomer to the school, Charmaine Gurney, was initially also on the hit list. On 19 July 1983 McCraw wrote a letter to her mother:

> Dear Dianne,
> Yesterday, during English, Charmaine was very rude to Mr Toben, the class teacher. She has had the school rules and procedures explained to her, many times, and is ignoring them. The education of the rest of the children in the class is suffering as a result of Charmaine's behaviour.
> Accordingly I am removing her from English classes for one week. She will be given work to do by the class teacher under my supervision. If the work is not completed in the time allotted she will be expected to complete it before the next lesson, either at home or at school after 3:30pm to my satisfaction. I would be most appreciative if you would discuss Charmaine's behaviour in class with her, as I will be during the next week.
> Yours faithfully,
> Ray McCraw.

This matter was followed up by a three-way discussion between the principal, the mother and the teacher concerned. When I saw Charmaine's mother for the first time I wished to assure her that I was not picking on her daughter. But I couldn't get through to her. Perhaps it was her serapax that prevented me from penetrating her grossly painted face and thin, dribbling lips as she told us how she had driven her former husband to a suicide attempt. McCraw was impressed by her because she had told him that the state parliamentarian, Bernie Dunn, was her cousin. Years later her brother, surnamed McLeod, was responsible for selling Premier Joan Kirner a fake Aboriginal painting. Certain Goroke residents found all this rather funny.

On 6 October 1983 Mrs Gurney received another letter from the school. This time it was not from the principal but rather from the Deputy Principal, David Hatherell. One may well wonder why this letter was not penned by McCraw:

> Dear Mrs Gurney,
> Over the past several weeks Charmaine has been involved in several victimisation incidents in the school. These have included threats, actual physical violence, and even the use of a knife. We say this with certainty, as we have corroborating evidence of this occurring.
> Obviously we are most concerned that she has been an aggressor in these incidents. Consequently, we request that you attend the school at 9:00am tomorrow, when we plan to deal with the students concerned, including your daughter.
> Yours sincerely
> D. J. Hatherell
> Deputy Principal

A year later Mrs Gurney was one of the chief accusers before the Enquiry panel, but more of that later.

So what's new in disciplinary matters? Frank Dando, principal of Ashwood Boys' School, summed it up as follows:

> I have this year been teaching without a break for 40 years and I have a master's degree in remedial education so I have some practical and theoretical understanding of the teacher's job in the classroom and considerable sympathy for my colleagues in the state system. It is not possible to do any meaningful work in the classroom unless you are in control; whether you are apparently in control is irrelevant, I am quite capable of convincing my class that I am running a democracy!

To control a classroom you need as a last resort to produce a short, sharp and non-negotiable punishment otherwise the class gets out of control and you go out on stress. I am quite ready to be told that there is no place for punishment in an ideal classroom but I would prefer to be told by a practising teacher. Could this be pondered by someone high up in the state system, preferably someone who has been teaching lately.

Another letter from former Edenhope High School teacher, Chris Curtis, tells how it was during the 80s:

Teachers can't survive in classroom jungle

I was one of the youngest teachers ever promoted to senior teacher in the state of Victoria. I am now on sick leave caused by stress.

My 15 years of experience in subject coordination, curriculum development, the day-to-day running of a school - not to mention classroom teaching itself (including a 92 percent pass rate at HSC) - are lost to the system. Why? Because the headaches, shortness of breath, sleeplessness and chest pains caused by the modern classroom jungle became unendurable.

A highly recommended assessment for promotion has not protected me. Excellent references from past principals, colleagues and students have not protected me. Ministry reorganisation, curriculum reform, school amalgamation and career restructure mean nothing. When a teacher walks into a classroom today, he is on his own.

He will meet defiance, abuse, threats and surly arrogance - 14 year olds with knowing eyes, ignorant minds and thirsty souls, children for whom the past 10,000 years of faltering progress mean nothing. Many would prefer to be drunk or doped.

I am sworn at regularly on yard duty. I have been yelled at. I have been threatened with having my head punched in. I have had mud thrown at me. And the quieter moments consist of a desperate rearguard action against low interest and poor motivation to develop knowledge, skills and, dare I say it, values in students who need to learn so much. Students' attitudes to each other can be worse than their attitudes to the teachers who are there to help them. Racist and sexist abuse, foul comments, intimidation and even physical violence occur far too often.

I have a thick folder of incidents from the past 15 months of my teaching career - the period since I came back from a friendly country high school to a large city school - which support the views of other teachers and education experts who say we have a discipline problem.

Those who belong to the other camp, who believe the problem does not exist or is under control, simply do not know what it is like out here in the real world that actual teachers face every day.

I became a teacher because I wanted to help children and I wanted to build a better world. I remained one despite the falling pay, the ignorant public attacks and ever-growing demands foisted on us. I would like it to be possible for me to be one again.

Chris Curtis,
Hurstbridge

Chris had obtained his senior teacher status from Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations, Jim Betson. After this public lament Chris was given system protection in the form of stress leave, and later he obtained an administrative post which protected him from direct classroom exposure.

* * *

"Well, where did it get you, getting friendly with these social outcasts?" demanded McCraw. Glenn and I had continued our conversation without noticing Julie-Ann and Maree leaving the staffroom and Ray entering from the office area.

“You told me the other day that Barbara threw a piece of chalk at you. This proves to me that you can’t handle such students.”
“True, Ray,” I replied, feeling just a little uneasy at Ray’s smile. “I prefer that kind of occasional slip to having her sit like a mute in the classroom, not saying or doing anything. Anyway, she was goaded into this act by others. It was her first experience of momentarily having been accepted by the class. Besides, she did apologise to me afterwards about her behaviour. What more can I ask for, Ray?”

“What a pity it had to be a negative influence,” said Glenn.

“Say that again,” Ray came in, ready to pounce. “The incident is an example of not being in control of your class, Fredrick. You won’t get anywhere supporting these social outcasts.”

“Ray, are you saying we are supposed to offer certain students a limited education, not challenge them, not bring them out of their shells, not extend their minds?”

“I’m not saying that,” Ray said without his usual smile. “What I am saying is that if you can’t control what’s going on in your classroom, then you are not exposing students to any meaningful learning situation.”

Mark Weegberg’s blustery arrival in the staffroom cut short the conversation. He attached his conversation to the tail-end of ours by telling us how the teachers’ unions had been working hard at developing programs for disadvantaged students. “It’s disgusting to have these injustices operating in our schools. Without union support many of our ethnic minorities would still remain an exploited and persecuted group. The VSTA has done a lot for downtrodden lesbians and homosexuals as well. Now these groups are at least permitted to display their different life styles at school without fear of prosecution.”

“What about the bisexuals?” I threw in for good measure. A hush fell over McCraw and Weegberg, and Glenn and I smiled at each other. “And Mark,” I added in an attempt to break the silence, “you are a walking contradiction. You say you are a Marxist. Have you ever read ‘Das Kapital’?”

“Look, Fredrick, I don’t have to take this abuse from you. I don’t have to answer your question!”

“You don’t have to, Mark,” I replied, “but your silence is an answer of sorts.”

And instead of sitting down and joining us at the table to thrash out our disagreements, Mark strutted from us like a mortally wounded saint whose belief system had just been shattered by an unexpected hitch in an otherwise water-tight argument. “Bloody fascist, that’s what you are - stuff you,” were his final words as he angrily slammed the staffroom door shut behind him.

Ray, who had been observing this altercation in silence, felt needed. “I think you just have to be a little more tolerant towards him, Fredrick,” he said sweetly, oozing charm.” I imagine he probably got a lot of teasing at school about his Dutch background. I suggest you treat him with a little extra understanding and then I’m sure you two will get along fine.”

“Me be more tolerant towards him?” I asked Ray.

“Well,” Ray said ever so sweetly,” you’re the one who provoked this outburst of his. You were the one who upset him. And you know that you’ve upset not only Mark but also a few female members of staff.”

“Now it’s me who causes disharmony in staffroom relations!” I gasped in amazement.
“You’ve got to know when to back down, Fredrick,” McCraw said in an earnest tone. “You’ve even upset some kids with your talk about mental challenges. Charmaine Gurney told me just the other day that she finds your talk upsetting.”

“Oh, come now, Ray,” I interjected, “that’s not fair. Gurney’s allowed to disturb my classes. You suspend Jody Lyall and Duanne Blythman for fighting and being rude, yet Gurney does the same thing at school … but no suspension for her. Why is she protected, Ray?”

“Look!” Ray snapped. “You’ve got to treat the children according to their social class. Home background is important and you know that Charmaine comes from a broken home. She was present, I think, when her father tried to commit suicide before his wife left him for another man, or something like that.”

“But surely,” I said, “we should treat our students with fairness. Anyone who causes trouble in the classroom ought to be pulled up, deserves to be told off and if necessary, be punished. Social background has nothing to do with it.”

“But we all have double standards,” Ray’s wife, Anna, interjected as she joined our group.

“What’s that, Anna? Double standards in teaching?” I gasped in disbelief.

“Well, Fredrick, we all do it,” she said casually as though it were an established fact.

“Look,” Ray said in a growl, “you can’t stress students too much. Give them what they want and no more.”

I just couldn’t believe what I was hearing. “Is this why you didn’t let Jane continue her Year 7 and 8 French classes this year, because there was no interest among her students?”

“That’s right,” he snapped. “We conducted a survey and the parents indicated they didn’t want French.”

“That’s not what Jane told me, Ray,” I replied. I could see him becoming irritable with my talk but the matter was too important to let fall now. I continued “This business is just like the nonsense some teachers are pushing in Melbourne’s western suburbs. Some think it would be a good idea to introduce Special English into schools with a large migrant student intake. That’s absolute rubbish because we have to offer such students real English and not something watered down - something that is condescending to their ethnic origin.”

“You don’t understand, Fredrick. You haven’t been long enough with the Department. We offer our students what they want,” said Ray, trying to sound convincing.

“I don’t know, Ray. It seems to me that taking French from the students - especially after they already enjoyed one year of it at secondary level - is really depriving them of language development. They’ll go

through this school without knowing a foreign language. You know how important such learning is for learning about English. Now you've turned them off, switched them off. You have actually reduced their diet of meaningful learning. If you can't expose children to rigorous learning situations, and a foreign language does this, then you're not doing them a favour either. I see this as mis-educating our children, Ray."

"You don't understand these country kids, Fredrick," he said laconically. "You shouldn't be at this school. You should be at a larger city school."

"Oh, don't give me that, Ray," I said impatiently. "You know I'm a product of a country education. Why, for example, should country kids be protected from demanding works such as Shakespeare? His plays have a universal appeal. That's why I'm giving my Year 9s 'The Merchant of Venice'. It clearly spells out the evils of intolerance. They're bright enough to understand that."

"Look, Fredrick," Ray responded testily, "you're stressing the kids. Can't you see that? Can't you see their misbehaviour is due to stress? That's why they're playing around in your class."

"May I remind you, Ray," I said in measured tone. "I am not the only teacher at this school who has discipline problems. Anyway, Ray, I was taught to extend a student's mind and not switch it off and let it slumber by offering it bread and circus. Did you read any of William's works while at school, Ray?" I asked in jest.

"I'm not going to talk to you anymore. You just won't listen to me." With these parting words Ray got up and left the room.

ELEVEN SHAKESPEARE CONTINUES

Despite all the normal pettiness at school, life in the classroom for me continued to be a demanding task. My students received a daily spelling and paragraph exercise and they reluctantly submitted themselves to a weekly dictation. As well, there was the weekly essay which had to be handed in on time. Naturally, all this work required me to mark many pieces of paper. I saw no sense in demanding that students work hard, then not giving them positive feedback in the form of a detailed criticism of their work. I pushed ahead with my literary studies and I was pleased to see Jane Wilkinson gave her couple of Year 11 students 'Macbeth'.

"Ray's behaving like a little Hitler," she said. "I showed the girls Polansky's version of Macbeth and they responded well to it. I don't know what's wrong with Ray. How can he not appreciate Shakespeare's characters? To think that in Shakespeare's time the stage was a naked room with a blanket for a curtain. And yet he made the stage a field for kings."

"Indeed," I responded gladly to Jane's comment. "Coleridge makes a similar point when he talks about Shakespeare's ability. He talks about the law of unity which is not founded in some custom but rather in nature itself. It's the unity of feeling which is found throughout his plays. And, of course, although the characters display libertinism, their passions are governed by morality."

"That's right," Jane responded. "If Shakespeare occasionally bothers a keen sense of delicacy, he never injures the mind. He neither excites nor flatters passion in order to degrade the subject of it."

I was amazed to hear Jane talking like this. "I'm reminded of what one critic said about Shakespeare's critics. He who has not a proud and affectionate reverence when he talks about Shakespeare, disqualifies himself. Too often we are not objective in our judgements. We are enslaved to the habits of our education and fail to rise above the particulars of our immediate circumstances."

"Well," said Jane, "I've had it at this school. I've had Ray. Two years of him is enough and I can't take him anymore."

What Jane didn't tell me was that she had also to work out her personal problems. The relationship with a Horsham farmer didn't seem to flourish beyond the sexual level. She felt sorry for him that he always wanted to have sex with her. She considered herself rather ugly, a ratty face, and so couldn't understand that a man could really love her for her inner self. It was all a great confusion for her and so she wrote long, detailed letters about her most private battles to a girlfriend in Melbourne.

I was pleased to see Jane bother with her classes. She battled hard with unwilling young males to gain their attention, to extend their minds beyond the immediate moment. She did not shy away from using her body for this. Especially on warm days she would come to school dressed in skimpy clothes, singlets sometimes. The boys would then remain quiet throughout the lesson, not listening to what she was saying but rather watching certain parts of her body.

Jane was more discreet about this kind of class control than, say, Karen Reid. Karen would sit on top of a desk so that the boys could see her underwear. On occasions some of my Year 7 and 8 boys would tell me that they were pink, white, blue, red even.

I was pleased that Jane liked the classics. Not like Bell and Weegberg, who did not hide their contempt for anything more demanding than 'Hey, Hey, It's Saturday'. For them, to see Daryl Sommers strutting

his life upon the stage was pure bliss. Red faces to those who couldn't discuss the show in the staffroom.

Bell would always snigger like a little girl when confronted with demanding material. Weegberg would use it as a cue to spout forth his socialism. "Shakespeare is had it," Mark jibed. "Anyone who thinks there's profit in studying this outdated material doesn't know what education is all about. They ought to have their head read."

"Mark," I interjected. "Do you really believe what you've just said?"

"We don't even know whether Shakespeare wrote the works. What crap!" he sneered.

"Mark," I said, feeling a little courageous, "it is irrelevant whether Bacon or anyone else wrote the works. It doesn't mater. You're missing the point about good literature. In any case, it's being read by millions of people all over the world. Even the Chinese are studying Shakespeare's works. Can you tell me why they, of all people, would bother to read these European works?"

"This stuff's elitist education and it's not fair for the workers," Mark feebly mumbled.

"Rubbish, Mark. The Chinese don't seem to think so. Your argument would also assume that we ought not expose our students to good classical music. Yet how often have I seen Italians digging ditches and singing opera while they're working. To dismiss cultural matters like that is to reduce life to a battle for money, possessions and power. Culture gives us a meaning for living."

"You piss me off, Fredrick," Mark said viciously. "You think you know everything, don't you? Well, let me tell you, you're just crapping along. You're full of shit."

As Mark stormed out the room I felt sorry for him. How can a person like that inspire our students to lift their sights? Politically correct movements, of course, are fighting a concerted effort against Shakespeare. I doubted, though, whether Mark worried about following any such line. Merely to suggest that studying Shakespeare's works may prove to be mind-expanding, would upset Mark. He seemed to be motivated by hatred and envy, something that became evident when, soon after submitting my permanency application to the principal, I traded in my old 1979 red Datsun for a white Volvo 244 DL. On a number of occasions I heard Bell, Ferlazzo and Weegberg encourage students to rubbish me about not having bought a real Australian car, like a Holden or a Ford. These teachers didn't even know that General Motors and Ford are American companies.

John Nunn, 'the flying nun' as he was affectionately known to his colleagues at Horsham Regional office, on account of his flying car trips to Melbourne - had been the Senior Education Officer since the Labor Party abolished the inspectorate. He had himself taught at various one-teacher country schools before joining the education bureaucracy as an inspector of schools. Now he had a new role as S.E.O. This position was actually a counselling role, comforting those teachers who had problems. John Nunn the 'confessor', the bachelor gentleman, the farmer's son, offered emotional support to those with frayed nerves. Jess, Audrey, Joan and Margaret had all taken their worries about McCraw to him.

I, too, had told him about Ray's permanency lie. Yet it appeared that he was powerless to intervene because the principal was omnipotent at school. John merely encouraged me to continue with my work. "I suppose your pride is hurt by his action," John said to me.

“What do you mean, pride?” I answered. “I am stunned that a principal has lied to a teacher about an important thing like permanency. It’s a moral problem, John,” I said. John just remained silent. I had had my say, and left his office. There was no more to be said. I had expected John to share with me my disgust at having found a lying principal. That was not to be the case.

At the beginning of Term I, the principal had predicted that “The shit will hit the fan at the end of Term II” When I asked why he was so sure of this he responded “I’ve been teaching long enough. Term II is a long term and we all get very tired with one another’s company. Something’s got to give - and by the end of Term II, something or someone will snap. It always does, believe me.”

And so the Goroke principal had now also become a great prophet. I was reminded of Nostradamus and his predictions. When he predicted that a fire would engulf and burn down a certain village in 1575, nine years after his death in 1566, people were amazed to see this French astrologer’s prediction come to pass. Soon after the fire, though, Nostradamus’s son was executed for having lit the fire. All he had wished to do was to ensure that his father’s prediction came to fruition. Curiously enough, Weegberg was also interested in Nostradamus, as well as displaying great enthusiasm for ‘The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Universe’. But Shakespeare was a definite no-no on account of his elitism. Weegberg never seemed to grasp the unity of things. Class thinking gave him a fractured world-view. How unlike Shakespeare’s view of the world where the heterogeneous is united as it is in nature.

When I mentioned such things to Mark he would invariably curse me for being elitist. I just laughed to myself because I could never deny my own humble background.

TWELVE CONSENSUS AND OPEN COMMUNICATIONS

Three weeks into Term II, Monday, 26 September 1983. Miss Coco had told me that McCraw had withdrawn his permanency recommendation. Two weeks later McCraw said "I'll look at your work again and in two months time, at the end of October, I'll write another report. I'm sorry how you found out about the permanency deferral but I hope that this will not affect our relationship in any way. We've got our in-service on Open Communications in two weeks time. I want to be sure that we're communicating as openly as possible." Ray talked to me with saddened eyes. He looked like a school boy who had just promised his teacher that he will never tell another lie.

"OK Ray," I said, accepting his outstretched hand. "I hope things will turn out for the better. All this stress is having an effect on my family."

"I'm sorry about that," he said hastily, "but we've got a job to do. In two weeks time we'll learn all about Open Communications. I don't wish to create the impression that we're not communicating openly at this school."

That evening I found a letter from my union, the VSTA. It had responded to my cry for help by suggesting that if the conflict between the principal and me developed any further then I should think about transferring out of Goroke and find myself a more sympathetic principal. Like McCraw, I, too, hoped that the forthcoming seminar would make a transfer option unnecessary. McCraw had at least shown some conciliatory characteristics. Perhaps silted communication channels could be opened up again by this Dr Wayne Flynn and his method of Open Communications. I mused to myself how strange it was that we lived in an age where it was easier to smash an atom than an ill feeling, a prejudice. It would pay to be cautious.

* * *

As he wafted into the room, Dr Wayne Flynn cut a progressive figure. His black skivy highlighted his long silver hair. His gold-rimmed glasses accentuated a large nose, but they did not hide his tired eyes. Eyes which had for over thirty years browsed through countless books, journals and magazines. In appropriate style, Ray introduced Dr Flynn and his young female companion to an anxious but otherwise willing Goroke staff.

"Dr Wayne Flynn was himself a principal of a large American secondary school, senior college, I think is the term used."

Ray was good at talking like that. Some staff members knew that the smoother his public performance, the more vicious his private lashing became.

"His model of conflict resolution is being used nationally in the United States. Dr Flynn is at present guest lecturer at the Hawthorn institute in Melbourne. I'm sure we can all learn something from Dr Flynn today and tomorrow as he guides us through his conflict-resolution techniques."

Most listeners were delighted to meet this real life success story, a genius who had perfected a way of getting along with people without conflict. An expectant air filled the room. Eyes glowed and childish enthusiasm abounded.

“Well,” Dr Flynn responded in a typical American drawl. “Thank you, Ray, for your kind words. I’m sure the next couple of days will be very fulfilling for all of us.”

As he continued to address the expectant participants, his helper distributed copies of the Life Orientation booklet. “Now, this booklet contains some questions which I’d like you to answer as truthfully as possible,” the good doctor continued. “Work through the questions as quickly as possible. The purpose of this exercise is to give each one of you an insight into your personal life-styles. This, in turn, will enable you to better manage your personal strengths.”

A buzz of activity, like some hornets’ nest violently disturbed, fell over the willing candidates. It was punctured by a few nervous giggles and a couple of grunts. But these indicated to Dr Flynn that all was well. “Well, I’ll give you an hour on this exercise. Good luck” And so the work of filling out the booklet began in earnest. Dr Flynn also had his work cut out. He began to prepare us for the evaluation of his exercise. He divided the class blackboard, greenboard rather, into four columns, heading each one thus:

SUPPORTING - GIVING;
CONTROLLING - TAKING;
CONSERVING - HOLDING;
ADAPTING - DEALING

“It is so easy to get into a stress-causing situation,” Dr Flynn almost whispered, and we had to physically strain ourselves to catch his pearls of wisdom. “And that’s when people get into a win-lose contest with others.”

Glenn and I winked at each other. Only too often had we heard the principal tell younger staff members that he only worried about win-lose situations. Anything else wasted his time. We spent the morning session on analysing each participant’s scores. Dr Flynn then offered us his interpretation of the results.

“Let’s begin with your score, Ray,” he said while his young assistant continued to sort out a stack of sheets. “You can see the low score in adapting and the high score in dealing. This means that you back off from conflict and collect more data. Once you’ve got enough information, you go in for the kill, but it’s then usually someone else who does it for you. Your low score in conserving/holding makes you a progressive who doesn’t like to be tied down by tradition. Similarly your low mark in supporting/giving, and your high mark in controlling/taking tells us that you like to be in charge of things.”

The group listened with interest to this somewhat trivial information. Any perceptive person could have made such assessments merely by watching during the course of a school day.

The astrological readings continued. “Robert Ferlazzo, the maths teacher, I believe,” Dr Flynn said. “You don’t show your feelings, but you’re hurting inside. Sometimes this kind of profile can lead to mental constipation. You, too, John Bell, Social Science of this school. You hide your feelings and cover up the pain through humour. You’re not really a fighter because your adapting/dealing score is too high. In fact, I have never seen such a high score before in this category. It’ amazing.”

“Yes,” Ray mumbled, “the school needs someone like John.”

“Val Bull, you’re the librarian and music teacher at the school, I believe,” continued Dr Flynn without responding to Ray’s comment. “You’re in contact with the group, and you maximise the present, but you don’t fight. You fit in. And sports mistress, Ann-Marie Aulsebrook, you don’t fight either. You just disengage.” The group continued to listen in awed silence to Dr Wayne Flynn’s pearls of wisdom. “Jane Wilkinson,” he continued, “you’re a language teacher. Now, this is interesting. You don’t like the traditional leadership role and that’s why stress shows on your face. Mark Weegberg, Commerce teacher. You’re fascinated by newness, by change. You don’t conserve and you don’t run away from conflict. Bruce Heggie, Woodwork and Metalwork teacher. You’re not comfortable in a leadership role, are you?” Flynn paused for a moment, sympathetically looked at Bruce and did not expect him to answer the question. Bruce knew Flynn’s comment was spot-on. “You’re not a fighter,” Flynn concluded.

“Fredrick Toben, English teacher at this school. You offer a breakthrough in understanding. Glenn Duncan, Art teacher. You’re not easy to read when in conflict. But you bring things out into the open. Karen Reid, Science teacher. You’re quite comfortable in your present position, but you’re stressed and you do avoid conflict. Robyn Watts. Cooking’s your speciality, isn’t it? Well, you’re sensitive to the group but you don’t appreciate belonging to it if it brings stress with it. You conserve but you are not interested in a leadership roll. And finally, Debbie Block, another Maths teacher at this school. You don’t change much under stress, though you do feel the stress felt by others. Well, ladies and gentlemen, that’s an overview of your personal psychological profiles as regards your own stress management and related matters.”

A distinct sigh of relief fell over the group as individual teachers relaxed in the knowledge that there was nothing wrong with their personalities.

“Let me make a couple of comments before we adjourn for a well-deserved break,” Flynn continued. “In all my time I have never come across such a high score in adapting/dealing as that obtained by John Bell. He’s good at manipulating the environment. We ought to contrast this with Fredrick Toben’s low score of 17. It’s obvious that John’s high 30 has to be balanced with Fredrick’s low 17. It’s obvious,” he spoke deliberately and slowly, “that John needs Fredrick and that Fredrick needs John.”

This remark thickened the air and it hung heavily over those who celebrated John Bell as some kind of saviour of the school. Ray, who had also scored highly on the adapting/dealing category, said for all to hear “Yes, the school needs John!” He must have muttered this at least half a dozen times, and I felt touched by it. “What about me, Ray?” I asked him. “Dr Flynn did say that John needs me. Isn’t that also implying that if the school needs John, then it also needs me?”

But Ray did not bother to reply to my concerns. He was already sauntering to the staffroom where refreshments waited for all.

During this break, Glenn approached me and asked “Where’s the primary staff?”

“I don’t know,” I replied. “Do you think I should ask Ray?”

“Why not? On this day of Open Communications he can hardly blast you for asking uncomfortable questions.” Mischief twinkled in Glenn’s otherwise innocent eyes.

“I invited them but they didn’t want to come,” Ray curtly said to me. End of story. I didn’t ask him why vice-principal David Hatherell had also stayed away.

After our morning tea break Dr Flynn asked his seminarians to form small groups so that the results of our life-style profiles could be discussed in more detail. It seemed strange that only Ray and I remained standing alone. It was clear that all other participants had found their partner without any problem. So Ray and I ended up together, locked in analytical mode and not really expecting anything startling to emerge. Wayne Flynn became the roving guru, the facilitator of a peep-show in which fears and frustrations jostled for attention.

Unobtrusively, Flynn floated about, offering a comment here and a clarification there, until he came to us. “The next step in this exercise is to have someone sitting in the hot seat,” he began. “We’ve had a good response from your staff, Ray. But the communication channels are still constipated, clogged up with bad feelings.”

Flynn’s eyes moistened and his voice quivered. “What we now need is someone to volunteer for the hot seat so that we can open up our communication channels. Would you, Fredrick be prepared to volunteer for the hot seat?”

“Why not? Of course,” I replied without hesitation. I didn’t have anything to fear or hide from anyone. It was worth the experience and my life-style score would, if accurate, support me throughout any ordeal.

Dr Flynn’s helper placed a chair at the front of the room and I was asked to take my place there. Flynn then asked for volunteers. “We need a few concerned people to sit in a circle around Fredrick. Anyone with a gripe against Fredrick can now come out and have his or her say,” he gently urged.

Mark was the first to rise and move his chair closer to me. John Bell followed him. Jane Wilkinson was next and she sat beside Flynn. The circle began to close in with Debbie Block shuffling towards me.

“Let’s have one more,” Dr Flynn coaxed as the atmosphere thickened. Robert Ferlazzo nervously began to stroke his greying beard. “Come on, let’s be courageous,” Flynn said. “Fredrick’s waiting for your words.” Robert stopped his squirming and beard stroking and he rose from his chair, placing a hand on Ray McCraw’s shoulder. “If you insist, Ray,” Robert whispered, “I’ll go.” Remarkably, Ray had remained silent throughout these proceedings.

“Well, that’s fine, that’s good,” Flynn responded to Robert’s move. “We’ve got Fredrick encircled. The next step is for this small group of concerned people to air their grievances about Fredrick’s behaviour.” Flynn reclined in his chair and with apparent calm watched for action.

Tension had built up considerably and Mark was the first to seize the opportunity of unloading himself. “What annoys me about Fredrick is that he doesn’t seem to listen to what I have to say. He’s always on about growth and development and maturity but he won’t change his ways. He also speaks badly about unionism. I don’t like that.”

“I don’t like the way he speaks to the kids,” added Robert bluntly. “There’s not enough feeling in his voice.”

“Fredrick can be arrogant,” Jane chipped in.

“That’s right,” added John, and although it was difficult to discern with what he agreed, John’s statement sounded weighty.

“I agree with John,” Debbie said, staring at me as if I had been turned into the devil himself. Personal anger and frustration, loosened through this Open Communications, built to a climax, then exhausted itself. The accumulated months of tension had now been offered an escape. Flynn had opened a safety valve with his method - and, as predicted, the ‘shit hit the fan’. The orgiastic binge spent itself and still I didn’t know what I had done to deserve from my colleagues such a barrage. It appeared that I had disturbed staff harmony and that this session was an informal cleansing process. I had been found guilty of the crime of “upsetting” some members of staff, of not having effectively communicated with my peers.

Now, not through reason but through an emotive, witch-hunting session, the scapegoat had been caught. Yet after an hour of this ordeal, facing my accusers and attempting to refute those general charges, I emerged none the wiser as to what I had actually done to my colleagues. I mused to myself: who would be next in line to be torn apart? Surely there would need to be another scapegoat as soon as the present euphoria faded into another teaching day.

The long-awaited lunch break dampened the charged atmosphere. As the seminarians moved out for lunch, I could hear Ray McCraw still babbling “The school needs John Bell! The school needs John Bell! The school needs John Bell.”

During the afternoon session Dr Flynn introduced us to a consensus-producing decision-making model, abbreviated in typical American style to S.T.P:

SITUATION/TARGET - PROBLEM/PLAN

This model had been devised by Frederick Fonmire in 1971. Glenn whispered to me “And that 15 year-old stuff they’re now feeding us, after it’s been cast off in the States. I don’t think they used the model in Vietnam, do you?” I smiled at Glenn, knowing that he had attempted to prepare himself for this next session by anticipating the general outline of the thickening plot.

“Well, now,” Dr Flynn began in slow, measured tone. “This morning we had an example of truck dumping. In an open system of communications such behaviour is not necessary because in an open system of communications we are always being honest with one another. We must remember that conflict need not always be negative. It can actually be quite healthy and invigorating. It gives us a chance to personally develop our communication skills, to grow within.”

Flynn’s audience looked puzzled and remained silent.

“Well, before we move on,” he continued, “are there any questions you would like to ask me? Now’s the time. Feel free to ask me anything that’s on your mind.”

“Yes,” Glenn jumped at the invitation, “I would like to ask you a question. If a person walks into a room full of people, and the people in the room stop their conversation, then who should feel guilty, the person or the people?”

“That’s a good question, Glenn,” Flynn smiled delightedly. “The answer is simple. The people who stop talking are obviously uncomfortable at the other person’s presence in the room. They find it

obtrusive because probably they're talking about that person or saying something that may be upsetting to that person. Their talk may have been about a confidential subject matter which the person has no right to know anything about. Does that answer your question, Glenn?"

"Yes," he replied, knowing that Flynn's answer raised a host of more serious questions. "I have another question, though" Glenn added, and without waiting for Flynn's response he continued "In an open system of communications, what role does humour and subtle giggles or smirks play in influencing other people's opinions and behaviour?"
"Another good question, Glenn. Right on target for our session," Flynn feigned enthusiasm. "You realise, of course, you are talking about a form of non-verbal body language. It can influence decisions in a very subtle way. The mentally not-so-robust will definitely be influenced by it. The straws in the wind will clutch at such influences because they lack inner direction. The persons who direct their actions from within themselves, in the Nietzschean sense - 'aus sich rollendes Rad' - will not be swayed by such expressions of negative feelings. That's why I encourage our S.T.P model which gives us the strength to remain true to ourselves, true to what we believe in. Does that answer your question?"

Without expecting a response from Glenn, Dr Flynn looked for another question. "Yes," I raised my hand, "I have a challenging question. What happens when teachers give up the concept of truth and replace it with expediency? What happens to the communications process when we talk about truth-bending, untruth, misleading, trapping and other such words which all mean telling lies?"

"That's a very good question," Flynn said sounding almost condescending. "I would expect no-one to give up being truthful. After all, we are professional educators and we just cannot give ourselves over to lying. That's bad for our kids who expect us to teach them the right ways of life. This does not mean," he added hastily, "that our beliefs about all sorts of things are not wrong. Many people believe in things that are not true. So we can see a situation arising where a person is telling a lie because he or she believes in something that is not true."

The group became restless and Flynn noticed this. "Does that answer your question, Fredrick?" he whispered.

"I have a related question," I responded. "What role does trust play in a community of teachers? Is it essential for it to be present and if so, what happens if trust is absent? And can an abuse of trust ever be remedied?"

"Well," Flynn mumbled. "would anyone else care to comment on this matter?" There was silence.

"Well," he continued, "I think if we look at the S.T.P model, we'll find some answers to these questions…." Flynn looked overworked, exhausted as he made his way over to the desk at which his assistant had placed the next written hand-out.

Suddenly Glenn exclaimed "I've got one final question; actually they're two related questions." Through a silent gesture Flynn indicated to Glenn that he would receive the question. "If a person has a negative feeling about a member of staff and he, himself, is too blind or unwilling to see his own blind spot, his own prejudice, what can be done about that? Secondly, does totally open communication and absolute honesty offend, and if you are open and others are not, what happens to you?"

“Glenn, I think we have to wait for answers to these questions a little later on,” Ray McCraw interjected ever so softly. “It’s time to get into the S.T.P model, our new model of open communications.”

A general sigh of relief rose from the meeting as McCraw cut short this one-sided questioning session. Weegberg had already begun his customary huffing and puffing snorts and Bell was already sniggering girlishly at me. I had not said anything to him throughout this session and I wondered what he was trying to tell me.
“Let’s consider a typical problem,” Flynn continued. “Timetable allocations. We have a limited number of lessons and we wish to take one lesson from some subject. How can we fairly solve this problem?” He paused and gazed probingly at his audience.

“I wouldn’t give a lesson away,” said Mark sternly. It appeared that he was ready to stand his ground. His snappy manner caused Flynn to modify his problem.

“You see,” Flynn hummed, “we are already in a conflict situation. By the end of this session, I guarantee you now, we’ll have the problem solved.”

Another deep sigh of relief rippled through the seminarians. Anger had turned into fright, then into relief as the great guru made his uncompromising pronouncement. He had surely begun to open doors for us all, through which we could walk, holding our heads erect, walking without fear and not running away from a closed door. Or, alternately, there was no need to break down a closed door. Talking opens them for us.

“Now,” Flynn continued, “let’s look at the ingredients of our problem. We have an aim, that’s clear. Would someone like to paraphrase our stated problem?”

Karen Reid eagerly offered to do just that. “We lack agreement on time-table allocation.”

“That’s good,” Flynn purred. “Now, let’s look at our problem statement: we lack agreement on our goals.”

“What’s this all about,” Glenn, in all innocence, suddenly interjected.

“Right, that’s a good question,” Flynn responded indifferently. “We need to clarify our situation. Someone has to give us a report on current lesson allotments.”

Robert raised his hand and spoke very softly. “The problem is to find an extra lesson for term one next year for Year 7. I intend to give them one lesson a week on Computer Awareness. This means I have to take one lesson from one of their other subjects.”

“You can’t have any of my Science lessons,” chipped in Karen Reid. “I’ve only got two.”

“And you can’t have any of my Social Science lessons either,” John Bell spat out. “By rights I should have four lessons with them but it’s been reduced to three.”

“I can’t see my metal and woodcraft classes being further split and reduced,” Bruce Heggie wailed. “It’s bad enough as it is.”

Dr Flynn smiled to himself, then at his assistant. “Well,” he grinned warmly, “we don’t seem to object to the target of introducing Computer Awareness into the Year 7 syllabus next year. What are we doing now?” he asked.

“We’ve got to get back to the problem again,” Ray offered.

“And for that,” Flynn grinned victoriously, “we need a survey. We now have some situational data,” he beamed. “We agree upon some targets or objectives. Let’s have a survey whether we all agree that Year 7’s skill base should be broadened by introducing Computer Awareness into their syllabus in 1984. Now, remember, if only one person says no, then we must again stop the procedure and find out why that person says no. We then have to offer that person more information.” A quick show of hands produced a unanimous result and Dr Flynn almost cried for joy. “There is a proposal. We now have an agreement on Computer Awareness. We have made a commitment, and at this point we should adjourn for a tea break. Do we all agree on that? Do we have a consensus on our tea break?” A chorus of seemingly exuberant voices coo-eed its agreement. And so another stage of this most gripping seminar concluded in unity of purpose, if not in unity of minds.

Slowly the seminarians drifted back into the room which had begun to turn them into open communication freaks. There was more to come and more was expected. “Our next step,” enthused Dr Flynn, “consists of someone formulating a time-table proposal.”

“I suggest,” Robert Ferlazzo began enthusiastically, “we take an English lesson for this purpose. We can divide the Year 7 class in half. One half can do the computer course while the other half continues with its regular English lesson. We then reverse the order to bring in the other half.”

It was obvious that my five English lessons were considered up for grabs by those who cared little for language development. Other schools were offering Computer Literacy as an optional subject, often during lunch times. Still, I realised that if I had no support from the top for my subject I would have to salvage as much as I could on my own.

“I don’t mind that,” I responded to Robert’s suggestion. “I intend to give my Year 7 English class one period of Radio in English. So while Robert’s got one half of the class, I’ll be with the other half in the radio studio.”

“Well, let’s see whether we have an agreement on this,” Flynn rejoiced. “Let’s take a vote on this by raising your hands if you agree with the proposal.”

Mechanically all hands rose, all except Weegberg’s. “One person passes,” Flynn noticed with interest. “What is your objection, Mark?”

“I don’t know anything about this new subject called Radio in English.”

“OK fair enough,” drooled Flynn. “Let’s get some more information on this proposal. Fredrick, can you offer the group some more information on your proposals? I feel Mark feels that radio is not a part of the English curriculum. Am I reading you correctly, Mark?”

“Yes, indeed,” Mark responded authoritatively. “I don’t think we can consider radio a part of the curriculum. It cannot be compared to Robert’s C.A. course.”

“Well,” said Flynn, “why don’t we have a survey?”

And again two lots of hands stabbed the air.

“Well, that’s fascinating,” grinned Flynn. “We have a tie in our survey. Remember, a survey is not a vote. Now let’s look at the problem in a little more detail. Fredrick, can you offer the group more information?”

“The course is designed to fit into my general English program,” I began, relishing the opportunity of talking about my new English component. “The situational data is essentially this: radio work will offer a small group of students the chance to develop their written and spoken English. Microphone work polishes students’ oral work. They’ll be performing and recording all their English work. I think it will be a group of about six students and that’s an ideal number in the studio. It’s about six, isn’t it, Robert?” I asked.

But Robert merely muttered something about the final number still being unavailable. “Well,” said Flynn, “are we now ready for another survey? Do we now agree that we have three English and three Maths lessons?” He paused and observed the group nodding in agreement. “Then can we move to our next problem? Do we all agree that two lessons are to be called Computer Awareness?”

Again there was much affirmative nodding. “And while these two halves have their computer work,” Flynn continued, “Fredrick will give them Radio in English?”

Again all agreed. “Well, ladies and gentlemen,” Flynn ceremoniously announced, “I am happy to say that we have now surveyed our initial proposal, and we have an agreement, by consensus.”

Self-congratulatory looks flashed between Flynn and his assistant while Weegberg, Bell and Ferlazzo looked puzzled.

“Well, I must congratulate each one of you for surviving the first conflict situation in such a calm fashion,” Flynn buzzed. “We have actually solved a very sticky problem, namely, timetable changes. A lot of ego is involved in such change.” Flynn’s words were well received and even the puzzled faces began to glow at hearing the word ‘ego’. “May I suggest that the group now breaks for about five minutes, then meets for a final de-briefing session. After all,” Flynn said emphatically, “de-briefing is an important part of this Open Communications process.”

“This is what we always do in flying,” I threw in as the group rose from its chairs. “After each flight we always de-brief. It is important to talk about what happens during a flight. In this way we learn to become better pilots. We should do the same after every lesson.”

“But we do, Fredrick, we do,” Weegberg yelped as he rushed along the corridor towards the staffroom where coffee awaited us.

When the group slowly filed back into the seminar room, Mark was already busy setting up the video equipment. He had been instructed to capture the final briefing session on tape. There had been no open communications process employed on that decision. No one had been asked whether they would object to being filmed.

“Well,” Dr Wayne Flynn drawled. “We’ve been very busy people today. Now’s the time to sum up what each one of you has found valuable in this course. What I mean is this: did you learn anything new today?”

“Yeah, I’ll start,” Mark enthused. “Up to early this morning I could have sworn that I would never speak to Fredrick again. But now, after today, I’m thinking differently. Fredrick’s not a bad fellow once you get to know him. We even agree on certain things.” Mark’s bearded face lit up some more as he continued to sing the praises of Dr Wayne Flynn’s work on Open Communications.

Others followed Mark’s witness. Each one of them made a reference to my personal change, that I had changed since this morning and that I was a good fellow. There was now, they felt, no reason for any animosity between them and myself. While these testimonials were being spoken, Ray McCraw felt visibly uncomfortable. Flynn’s confessional had lightened the burden of the rest of the staff - all, in fact, except the principal. When, after a couple of days, I reminded Ray about the results of the seminar - that the allegation of my not getting along with staff was without foundation - he reminded me that I still had unruly students in my English classes, and these students didn’t like me. “I want to see a marked improvement in this respect,” McCraw told me quite firmly.

“But I’m not the only one who has problems with students,” I protested. “What about Mark?” I pleaded.

“You’re forgetting that he’s permanent and you’re not. Before giving you your permanency I must be convinced beyond doubt that you can control your classes. End of story.”

Yet, wasn’t that the old story in re-run? The seminar on Open Communications had been a mere interlude of common sense. The self-congratulations continued at the end of the seminar. While Dr Flynn and his assistant packed their bags, they had to contend with some groupies.

“It takes a lot of emotional strength to get this far,” Flynn told his worshippers, wiping away a couple of tears. “You’ve progressed very well, and I’d like to congratulate each one of you for giving so much to me. You must be one of the most co-operative groups I have worked with during my stay in Australia.” And again he wiped away tears from his cheeks. Later, Debbie Block commented on this scene. “Did you see that? He actually cried! What a wonderful man! He must have been exhausted after going through all this with us. Yes, what a wonderful man. He actually cried afterwards. What a wonderful man!”

For about a week the after-effects of the seminar could be felt in the staffroom. Harmony and openness, the result of the seminar’s euphoric rush, lifted Robert’s and Mark’s spirits. They invited Glenn and me to their regular beer session, and for a couple of sessions Glenn and I listened to their self-congratulatory stories. The next few staff meetings were also conducted in a relaxed atmosphere. Then suddenly certain students were bad again and staff presented a united front against them. But the new meeting procedures enabled staff to air their feelings on anything, on any topic. No issue was too contentious, because the whole staff now willingly shared a colleague’s problems. McCraw and Ferlazzo appointed themselves as the interpreters of the new system of Open Communications, of consensus politics. Now the staff meetings were filled with questions about correct procedures. And McCraw and Ferlazzo feebly offered their interpretations which remained unchallenged because they sounded just like the words of Dr Flynn. “A lot of hot air for non-creative souls,” Glenn commented to me, and we both had a good laugh at someone else’s expense.

But eventually it had to happen. The euphoria of the Open Communications seminar, like a honeymoon or a born-again experience, couldn't last. It was a certainty that Monday followed Sunday. The fading effect was directly proportional to the emergence of a new form of censorship. It began with my asking Ray about my teaching performance. The in-service had actually been a rescue mission for me. It had given me a new lease on life at the school. Whether this was what McCraw had intended to do when he brought Dr Flynn to the school remains speculation. It certainly backfired if he intended to use it as a pressure mechanism to get me out of the school. The seminar had confirmed my value system, that I had been practising open communications all the time, and that it was the others who had an inflexible and intolerant mind-set.

The crunch came after about two weeks when I wished to discuss with McCraw the behaviour of certain students whom I knew to be friendly with the principal. Mark Ross and Charmaine Gurney. Surprisingly it was not Ray who blocked the discussion, but rather his wife, Anna. "That's your problem, Fredrick," she interjected during the staff meeting. "We can't consider these problems as a staff. You've brought this problem with the two kids upon yourself. It's your behaviour that's caused these kids to be rude to you. That's your problem, not the staff's"
I was stunned to hear this from Anna, and I wasn't quick enough to ask her who had appointed her as staff spokesperson. By this time the next agenda point had already been raised. Ferlazzo rambled on as I feebly gasped in disbelief at how my problem fizzed into nothingness.

Ray also began to openly celebrate John Bell again as the saviour of the school. "I don't know whether Ray isn't secretly in love with John," Glenn mused. "John's as tall as Anna. Ray's squatty build and Anna's beanstalk frame give this thought a distinct air of reality."

BOOK THREE - PEACE AND CONSENSUS AMIDST WAR

THIRTEEN GENERAL PROBLEMS

In all schools, lunch times see a thronging crowd urgently escaping from its classrooms. The Goroke Consolidated School was no exception. Our bell monitor, Chris, had just rung the electronic bleeper which was still referred to as the school bell. Immediately afterwards jostling students streamed from their classrooms quickly clogging up the long and narrow locker corridor. The noise quickly peaked, then died as suddenly as it had begun. When I left my English room, the corridor was empty. Students had rushed outside to take possession for the next ten minutes of their favourite lunch time spots. Detainees and latecomers would miss out on such an important choice. It would spoil their whole afternoon, and woe be a teacher who dared detain students during the lunch break!

As I approached the staffroom door, I heard a mighty roar emanating from the office area. Ray was blasting someone in no uncertain tone. In the staffroom the sound of Ray's verbal outburst wafted through the storeroom door linking the school office with the staffroom. Teachers munching away at their sandwiches or pies and drinking tea or coffee fell silent. The principal's wife, Anna, walked in. "I've had this Glenn Blythman. I won't teach him again. He just refuses to bring his needlework money. But of course," Anna added mockingly, "he wants to go on the canoe trip." She looked disturbed as she poured herself a cup of tea.

Then, perhaps because no one responded to her words, she sat down at the centre table and began reading one of the five newspapers to which the school subscribed. The state's dailies, The Sun, The Age and The Australian, usually remained intact until lunch time. The weekly local Kowree Advocate and the tri-weekly Wimmera Mail-Times, however, were eagerly perused by those teachers who had appointed themselves as the spokespersons of the school. Somewhere there would be an item from the Goroke school, perhaps including the name of a teacher, which publicised aspects of school life. The Country Education Project, and its West Wimmera chairman for 1984, Robert Ferlazzo, would receive publicity because of having received a $135,000 grant under the Commonwealth Schools Commission program. So, too would the $300,000 school building project. I remained oblivious to any newspaper reports of any kind because I was simply too busy trying to build up the English department at the school.

"Well, one less for the trip," Ray almost shouted as he fell into a chair. "I've had this Blythman family. Only last week his mother tells me a sob story about not having enough money for school. Now there's enough for the trip. Other families on less seem to manage to pay their needlework money. Why can't she?"

I left the staffroom without having my cup of coffee and later, during my walk around the school ground, I again saw a familiar sight. Glenn Blythman's brother in Year 10, Duanne, was again walking around the school grounds with bin in hand, picking up papers. Duanne had had a disagreement with David Hatherell about the canoeing costs and in protest had refused to participate in physical education, something he was good at and loved to participate in. It seemed sad to see this well-built, healthy and fair-complexioned boy now defiantly, head upright, suffering this public humiliation.

The next day at school I saw more student problems. Charmaine Gurney, the city-bred kid, had no problems in asserting her self-imposed top dog status on her somewhat gentler country cousins. Barbara Anton wasn't a match for her and both knew this. Barbara's illiteracy was a serious enough handicap and she didn't need to be thrashed by Charmaine. Yet that's what Jane Charmaine did. She

fought Barbara for the top dog position when there was never a likelihood that Barbara would seek that position for herself. Jody Lyall was still the original top dog. But through continuous absence from school, she lost this position to Gurney. Whenever Jody returned for that odd day at school, Charmaine would willingly abdicate to her. Oddly enough, when Jody returned during the final week of the 1983 term, she also did not challenge Charmaine. Instead, she picked on harmless Kaye Taylor.

Boys at this school didn't really get into any notable skirmishes with each other. Even Duanne and his good mate, Marshall Drummond, were not the overtly bullying kind. No-one picked on them and neither was their pushing and shoving of any consequence. These two boys, however, did challenge teachers, especially those who feared their physical prowess. The principal, a weed of a man whose own dark complexion stood out against these two blond strapping youngsters, would on occasion confess that disciplining such boys was a pure act of bluff which had him shaking in his shoes. It was obvious why McCraw had dearly loved to ensnare such youths into the bureaucratic Glasser system of discipline. It enabled him to continue smiling at the boys while they were being screwed into submission

At the next staff meeting the Gurney Anton fight was tabled as an information item. "You see," Ray pontificated as we touched upon the issue, "we've got quite a few very vicious students at this school. Even Charmaine Gurney has been influenced by Jody Lyall's viciousness. Mrs Gurney has told me that her daughter certainly never acted so viciously at her Melbourne school. The Goroke kids are making her into a vicious little bitch."

"I don't know about that," said David Hatherell rather defensively. "I think there's far more fighting at city schools than in schools of our size. We must expect some form of fighting to occur in our school, surely?"

And so the matter of student discipline had been tabled, talked about, dealt with. There was nothing much to say about it because each teacher feared having the finger pointed at himself or herself. Ever since the Glasser system had been voted off the agenda, any teacher, except the inner group, was deemed to be responsible for maintaining student discipline. During the following days the issue receded into the background noise of school life. Teachers were busy teaching and students were busy learning. School staff seemed to be presenting a united front against any unruly student behaviour. I therefore decided to approach McCraw again and raise the matter of my permanency.

"Any complaints about my work, Ray?" I said jovially, knowing that I had been out of his focus for over two weeks.

"Yes," he smiled at me, "your classes are still too noisy."

"But I can silence them absolutely, should the need arise," I protested.

"You lack class control, Fredrick," Ray snapped.

"But," I pleaded, "Bruce's, Karen's, Mark's, John's and even Robert's classes are sometimes in chaos. I haven't had chaos yet."

"I told you before, Fredrick. That's different. That's something entirely different to your case. These teachers are permanent and you're not. If you want permanency I want to see your classes in order and I want to see this over a period of time."

I walked away from Ray without bothering to respond to his final words. I just wondered what made him tick. As I approached the radio studio a group of enthusiastic students greeted me. “Sir, will you look through this script before we record the play?”
“What’s the magic word?” I responded warmly. These kids gave the lie to what McCraw had told me about not getting along with students.
“Please, sir?”

“OK let’s have a look at your script, Richie. Then let’s have a dry run through the play.” And while Andrew Mann and others set up the recording equipment I again wondered about McCraw’s perception of things. It bothered me that McCraw could only order people about but that he did not set a good example to his staff. Was this a consequence of his much acclaimed leaning towards ‘double standards’?

When Charmaine Gurney foul-mouthed me in the corridor, I mentioned it to McCraw. “It’s bad for you when students abuse you like that. They don’t respect you. It proves to me that the general student body doesn’t respect you.”

“But,” I protested, “it’s only one girl who gives me such nonsense. She’s been rude to Robyn Watts and other teachers, too.”

“That’s different,” he snapped. “You are still only a temporary teacher and you’ll have to improve your relationship with the students if you want to join the system and become a permanent teacher.”

“Ray,” I protested, “why is it that you don’t pull up Gurney for her behaviour? Why are you blaming me for her rudeness?”

“I’ve said everything that I’m going to say on this. You want something. It’s your job to convince me that you can control a classroom.”

I didn’t bother replying to his words. One rule for me and another for the other teachers. It all seemed so unfair. It didn’t make any sense - and this from a principal who was supposed to be communicating effectively to all his staff. Double standards, whatever it was called, it just seemed absurd that students got away with such nonsense.

Once at home I quickly recovered in my wife’s presence, and the smiling innocence of our son made me forget McCraw. I lifted our Karl into my arms, swung him around a little, then the three of us embraced. It was so good.

* * *

Years later I publicly pulled out the paedophile card against McCraw in a paper presented to the 1995 Adelaide annual conference of the Australian College of Education. Therein I stated:

The problem with corporal punishment is that those who administer it must possess moral integrity. I personally saw a primary school teacher smack a nine-year-old in a most shocking way. The principal sat on a chair and his left hand forced the boy’s face into his crutch while his right hand slapped the boy’s exposed bottom.

During my twelve years' litigation against the Victorian Education Department's bureaucrats, such material was deemed by my legal advisers as inadmissible and irrelevant evidence. In retrospect, of course, I should have strongly insisted on airing all these irrelevancies which clearly highlighted McCraw's moral corruption of minors and his own moral degeneracy.

FOURTEEN CANOEING

Our sports mistress, Ann-Marie, organised a staff canoeing trip to the Grampians, now called by their Aboriginal name, Gariwerd. It was to be a follow-up to the Open Communication seminar. I decided not to spend the weekend with my wife and child in a tent in the bush but rather make a Saturday morning appearance instead. Both of us felt that if I did not turn up, it would be construed as a snub. And so the three of us headed off on the 90-minute trip south. Karl soon awoke when we told him we had reached the big lake.

There, spread out on a well-used camp site we saw the tents which housed those teachers who braved the cold conditions for two nights in the bush. We arrived at the point where Ann-Marie was just telling the group that windy conditions made it impossible to exercise on the lake. Instead, she told us, we would split into pairs and participate in an exercise along a shallow creek bed called 'up the creek endurance paddle'.

The pairing-off followed predictable lines. The Open Communications seminar had merely highlighted personal differences, not overcome them. And so while Georgina and Karl waited for our return from our journey along the creek, Glenn and I ventured forth together. We made good progress along the rather narrow stretch of water. Hanging branches would splash our faces as we gently pushed our way through the undergrowth. We had little problem in keeping up with our instructor. There was a lot of shouting behind us and even the return journey along the same route evoked similar outbursts. There was indeed much ado about nothing.

As we all trundled in, Ann-Marie announced that as a final exercise before day's end we would all have to participate in a water ball game. The mouth of the creek formed a largish pool of water, ideal for some games. She divided us into two arbitrary teams and in no time we were all in our canoes speeding towards the ball in the centre of the pool. Val Bull's canoe was swift but never on course and it continued to bump into the Weegberg-Bell canoe

Then something surprisingly swift happened. Just as Glenn and I were about to claim the ball, Mark and John rushed towards us. Glenn called out to me, "Hang on, turn into the ball." Mark and John bore down upon us and I was just thinking about self preservation. With one hand holding on to our canoe, I extended my other arm and pushed theirs away from ours. Mark and John clearly saw what was about to happen and they both called out, "No! No! No!". But it was too late and their canoe began to rapidly fill with water. They just sat there frozen as their canoe sank. They continued sitting in the water as their canoe slipped from under them, their life jackets relieving them from any possible fears of drowning. "Sorry, Mark, sorry, John." Glenn and I shouted at them. We had not done this on purpose and so we also lunged vainly at their fast-disappearing canoe. Our rescue mission was a serious attempt which failed. We simply couldn't get the overturned canoe across ours so that it would empty of water. Mark and John also failed in their attempt at getting back into their canoe, and they swam to shore.

I felt bad about this incident because in some respects it was so funny. The two victims had had an experience which they would have delighted in had it happened to someone else. I recalled an incident in which a shopkeeper had overcharged a customer, then when challenged over this matter called it an honest mistake, despite the fact that he had a history of such honest mistakes. The canoeing incident is best described as having elicited some form of Schadenfreude, the feeling that the misfortune was somehow deserved. Glenn, as ever, was ready to develop this incident. "The exercise reminded me of Mark's use of deBono's phrase 'lateral thinking'. In his case it was lateral water integration!"

Our return trip was a quiet affair because the three of us were rather tired. I chuckled to myself at regular intervals as the canoeing accident flashed before my eyes. “You know, dear,” I said to my wife,” I didn’t do it on purpose. But it was funny to see Mark and John floundering in the water.”

“I know, dear,” Georgina replied. “I know you wouldn’t do such a thing on purpose.” Her tone indicated she was not quite convinced. “Please, believe me, dear,” I said, “it was an accident.”

“I know,” she smiled. “I’m only teasing.”

And as we continued our journey home Karl in the back seat had already dropped off to sleep with a contented smile on his face. “Isn’t he a sweet little boy?” she asked rhetorically. I reached out for her hand and held it in mine. It felt so good.

FIFTEEN UNWINDING TERM II

The weekend canoeing adventure had drained some staff members of their usual Monday morning exuberance. Morning assembly seemed somewhat subdued, without the usual wise-cracking. The two most vocal staff members, Bell and Weegberg, remained remarkably silent, and students noticed this. Some students smiled at Duncan and me - a knowing smile. Bell's and Weegberg's recent water-dipping exercise had already begun to fuel the local gossip mill. Mark's usually salivating vocal cords had dried up and John's odd sense of humour had gone sour. They both looked gloomy and dejected. Colleagues pitied them, and Ann-Marie smiled at them with indifference.

Bell and Weegberg also remained remarkably quiet during the after-school staff meeting. It was Anna McCraw who, using the Flynn method of Open Communications, eagerly aired her feelings about poor student behaviour. "Jody Lyall called me a 'rotten bitch'," Anna said indignantly. "And this before all the Year 10 students. What can we do about such rudeness? It's terrible. I think we, as staff, must stick together against such students. We must ensure that such behaviour does not re-occur. It's a terrible example and other kids will copy her if she gets away with it."

Anna's speech was met with silence. I smiled to myself and wondered how Ray would handle the situation. Had this happened to me, then he would have told me it was my personal problem. I certainly had no problems with Jody, nor with any of that group's toughies. "Well," Ray came to the rescue, "I've noticed that certain students' behaviour leaves much to be desired. Jody is not the only one."

Bruce Heggie offered some more information on the student. "If you know something about her family background," Bruce began, "then you begin to understand what problems she brings with her to school. She has no family life."

"Yes, that's true," added Karen. "Have you seen how big her hands are? Almost like a boy's hands. She's a strange girl. I've tried to get through to her but I just can't. I've really tried."

Other teachers offered their 'feelings' and 'information' about Jody Lyall, and I heard the obvious cop out, 'family background', again and again. I did not ask why some disadvantaged students somehow overcame their backgrounds and others not. From family background the discussion focused again on the individual, to Jody's lack of interest in school subjects. Somehow this explained her classroom inattention.

And so the discussion fizzled out and Anna McCraw felt better because no-one had told her that perhaps her own character was quite objectionable to some students. She, together with her husband, had quite unashamedly claimed at the previous staff meeting that we all operate with double standards. I had taken great exception to such a generalisation, but such an objection in itself merely proved that I was a difficult person, that I had some character defects.

Ever since the Flynn S.T.P method of conducting meetings had been used at staff meetings, there seemed more order in its procedures. Situation - Target - Problem/Plan somehow gave us working beacons with which to illuminate so many of our problems. One factor, however, had no scope in such a scheme of things. Just as we were all about to disperse from our meeting someone called out that it would be my turn to provide Julie-Ann with a birthday cake the following day. I acknowledged the call and thought how I would ask my wife to look after that matter for me.

* * *

The party was a resounding success, if success is measured by the loudness of laughter and giggles. I would have shared in such laughter, often quite hysterical, but it always followed after a vicious comment about less fortunate members of the Goroke community - those without a job, those who'd hit the bottle, those without a partner, those without money and social standing.

The school celebrations continued for a while at the principal's residence. I wasn't invited, something that didn't surprise me. My withdrawal from such hysterical giggling sessions had been noted earlier in the staffroom. Unwisely I had told Weegberg that such outbursts indicated to me some very serious psychological problems. It was all too forced and strained to be genuine and sincere and spontaneous. "Can't you see that comments like that are very hurtful," my wife said admonishingly when I told her the story.

"But I'm supposed to suffer such nonsense without making a response. Why should I remain quiet?"

"You know what I mean. I need say no more. It's no use talking your way out of this," she added pleadingly.

Just then another burst of hysterical laughter wafted across to us from the principal's backyard. I looked at my wife in silence. She returned my glance and embraced me. Both of us knew how we felt about the shrieks from next door.

* * *

Once a week the inner circle met at the local hotel. I had not been invited to this gathering of core teachers, and even the Open Communications in-service had not lifted the ban. So much for the strength of a theoretical model over the flywheel of habit. In any case, I had little interest in listening to McCraw's crude jokes - which weren't even funny. One particular evening Glenn turned up at our doorstep after spending an evening at the hotel.

"Listen to this joke from McCraw," Glenn beamed. "It's a really sick joke, and that from a principal. He said he had had two kittens and he had managed to give one away. So he was stuck with the other kitten which they did not want. He therefore put the remaining kitten in the long grass behind his garage at the back of his house, then started the lawnmower. The long grass did give the kitten a sporting chance for a few moments."

I shuddered in disgust. "Is this what today's principals are on about? I wonder who appointed him Goroke?"

Whenever I hear gossip that interests me, I make it my business to seek out the source to make sure that I have not got a coloured version of events or incidents. I certainly was in this case of the cat having been given a sporting chance in tall grass. The following day I asked McCraw about the story. He looked at me with vicious eyes and smiled through his beard, then said: "So what - who gives a stuff?"

* * *

My students continued to respond well to my English lessons. I had the odd-whinger who found my ten spelling words a day just a little too demanding. But I did not yield in this basic aspect of my course

work. The school radio station also provided students with a varied field of experience. Surprisingly, all staff members participated in recording their item for the daily 'Thought for the Day' program. It was quite a task to have these item recorded on time for broadcasting at morning recess. Unless participants obtained their own quotations, I simply lifted them from the office desk calendar. Julie-Ann was pleased to help in this project.

* * *

The end of the 1983 school year was approaching fast and we all welcomed the final six weeks, though it meant having to write up reports and a general tidying up. The parent interview day was a resounding success for me. Parental feedback showed that my rigorous approach in English was appreciated. This was all the praise I needed to continue working hard at the school. That Grant Hausler's mother told me of her son's dislike of Shakespeare left me unmoved. More so because the boy, with an obvious German background, walked around school clutching a book with the title 'The Evil Hitler'. Grant liked talking about Hitler's evil ways but few students really bothered to listen to him. There was one exception, Charmaine Gurney, who would later on call me Hitler.

The parent-teacher interviews were especially pleasing because Ray had told me a week before that 'some parents' wished to take their children out of the school because they were not happy with me. Not one of them complained to me about my classwork.

A couple of weeks later Mark Ross told his Year 9 class that were I to remain at the school in 1984 he would transfer to Edenhope High School. This comment had to be followed up. I visited Doug Ross one afternoon and I was surprised to hear a completely different story. Doug had only a 500 acre farm and it would not be large enough for his two sons. He therefore wished his eldest son, Mark, to pursue his studies instead. And so again I found half-truths propelling the gossip mill. Why, I wondered would children be interested in generating such stories? I confronted McCraw with this new information, and I saw him visibly fumble. When I asked him why he had told such a story he simply remained silent.

This whole affair, this deceptiveness explained to me why Anna McCraw was against parent-teacher interviews. She had floated the idea during the past five staff meetings, telling a disbelieving staff that parent-teacher interviews were a waste of time. "It's quite clear to me that the parents are not interested in attending these interviews," Anna would pontificate quite vehemently. "They don't care about the interviews because they don't care about their children. Can't you see that, Fredrick," she exclaimed in an almost hysterical pitch. Any response from me might have upset her to the point of laying myself open to the charge of having caused a nervous breakdown. And still I persisted, refusing to be forced into silence by such tactics.

"But Anna," I firmly replied, "we must offer our services to the parents. There are still enough interested in coming to school and meeting and talking to the staff about their kids."

"Look," she snapped, "you're wasting your time. Most of the families here are either Catholics or Lutherans, and aren't the Lutherans a bit funny?"

I could not reply to her because I had no contact with either group. Anna's snap judgement about the local Goroke community seemed to me too convenient, too superficial. Was it not our task as educators to sell education to the community, regardless of social and religious divisions?

What a parent-teacher day produced was of course the opportunity for parents to meet individual staff members. The character interpretation offered by the principal about various staff members would soon surface as being accurate or not. Eliminating the parent teacher meetings would isolate teachers from the community. Was this what McCraw wished to do in my case?

SIXTEEN NO PERMANENCY

All my Year 9 students without exception had excelled themselves in their Merchant of Venice assignment, and I was proud of their efforts. I also had a great urge to share the results of my labour with the principal. Folder in hand I approached his office. He was standing in Julie-Ann's area giggling about something. "Ray," I said with some reluctance, "have you got a moment? I'd like you to have a look at these Year 9 Shakespeare assignments."

"I haven't got time right now, Fredrick," he replied. "I meant to see you about yesterday's incident in your classroom. When I walked past your room I heard too much noise. You had students arguing with you over punctuation rules. They were cheeky and you confused them."

I was amazed to hear this from him, and with folder in my outstretched hand I began "But, Ray, you know …"

"Don't give me your crap," he snapped. "Just remember that the end product does not justify an argumentative attitude in class. It shows that students have no respect for you. Am I making myself clear?"

He stared icily at me for a moment, then began to walk away, leaving me standing there with assignments in hand. "Aren't you interested in the quality of my classwork, Ray?" I feebly called after him without expecting him to respond. I recalled how Jane Wilkinson had told me about McCraw blocking her French teaching for this year. Only a couple of weeks ago my Year 8 students had confirmed this new story about the principal's negative attitude towards language learning. Bridget Carracher was quite explicit about it. "My parents wanted me to go on with French this year. What use is doing it for one year? But McCraw told them the school wouldn't offer it this year because the demand just wasn't there for it to be taught."

And now the principal refused to look at my classwork. So the switching off of education services at Goroke had begun. School Council president, Kevin Johnson, would tell me later that this had happened before, during the late 60s and early 70s when the Department wished to close the secondary section of the school.

That earlier battle, however, had been won, and the recent six-month building activity proved the point. Ray had made this project his own. He relished walking about the new school buildings, a satisfied grin protruding through his greying beard, a beard which all too often served to mask his true feelings.

Ray had reason to be proud of the new school complex. John Hodge, the gardener, had done a wonderful job landscaping the whole area. The messy building site of July and October had produced untold interruptions to the ordinary conduct of classes. Now it was almost a thing of the past. During the final weeks of the 1983 school term a number of senior students did nothing but help clean up around the new building which, it was planned, would be opened in February 1984 by the Regional Director of Education, Dr Ken Boston. Mark Weegberg had already been busy in organising a suitably inscribed commemorative plaque.

* * *

Six weeks before the end of the school year it was Julie-Ann who entered my classroom. "Fredrick, Ray wants to see you in his office," she said sternly. Her usual giggle was replaced with a commanding tone but her heavy perfume still celebrated a girlishness that belied her advancing years.

“Then let us brace ourselves for whatever …” I muttered to myself, as Julie-Ann disappeared.

“What’s this? Reciting poetry?” Glenn asked, popping into my room in response to my having talked to myself.

“Hello, Glenn,” I was glad to see him. “It’s not a pleasurable exercise that’s looming before me. My two months are up and Ray is about to let me know how he rates my performance at this school, whether he’ll continue to support my permanency application or reject it.”

“Good luck,” Glenn responded. “I hope you make it. I still haven’t got anywhere with my application. I’ll have to push him a bit, I think.”

I walked along the narrow corridor, my mind a blank.

“You’ve sent for me, Ray,” I said entering his office, trying to sound cheerful.

“Yes,” he began in a soft velvety voice, obviously relishing the situation. “Sit down. I’ve been thinking a great deal about your permanency application. I have decided not to grant you your permanency because I find your performance in the classroom less than satisfactory. Certainly for this school you are unsuitable. It doesn’t mean that this is the end for you but I feel that you should develop your teaching skills some more so that you can begin to get on top of your massive discipline problems.”

“Are you telling me that my work is not up to standard, that my classwork has not been of any value to my students? Why didn’t you look at my students’ work, Ray?’ I added, beginning to feel defensive.

“Look, Fredrick,” Ray snapped, his eyes staring at me. “I’m not going to discuss this with you. All you do is talk your way out of things and that won’t help you become a better teacher. I’ve made up my mind and I shall send in a report of my decision to Staffing.”

“Can I have a look at that report before you send it off?”

“I’ve made up my mind. There’s nothing to be gained by talking about this matter any more.” With these words he rose from his chair and walked away from me. I remained standing there, stunned at the prospects of not viewing the final, negative, assessment of my teaching competence. Then I remembered that I had only 15 minutes in which to compose myself before I had to convene the weekly staff meeting.

* * *

In great haste I pushed the information items through. No-one seemed to care about the speed at which this was done. An efficiently run staff meeting was always appreciated. Just before I closed the meeting, I mentioned the final information item about my failed permanency application. “Ray’s decided not to accept my permanency application,” I said. “It seems that I’m not good enough to join the Victorian state teaching service.”

A general hush fell over the meeting and no one said anything. I closed the meeting and left the school. By 5:30pm I was sitting in my car heading for Ballaarat where the Australian College of Education’s regional annual meeting was to be held at 8pm. I looked forward to the company of professional

educators. I needed professional support at this time, especially after having had my year's work blasted out of the water.

That night I stayed in Ballaarat at a colleague's home. He extended much comfort to me because he himself had gone through a similar experience when Queen Anne's College had sacked him from his teaching post. Fortunately he had found solace within the government school system. And that was the irony of the situation which hit home that night. I had been declared unfit by a primary principal in his second year at his first school.

* * *

The following day I returned home via a brief stop at Horsham Regional Office, there to talk about the previous day's happenings with the Senior Education officer, and former inspector, John Nunn. John listened patiently to my lament. He absorbed my personal frustrations, and his mothering style relieved my tensions, my shame.

"Your ego's hurt," he said in measured tone. "Just continue doing your best and make sure you have all your written work up to date."

The following day John visited the school. "Just a routine visit" he informed the staff. He made a special point in visiting my classroom. That very same afternoon, after John had left the school, Ray made a pointed attack on him. "John's a weak man. He's a nice man, wouldn't hurt a fly. He's nice to everyone but he's gutless," McCraw added sneeringly, making even Robert Ferlazzo cringe with embarrassment.

SEVENTEEN MORE DEMOTIONS

Days after McCraw had rebuffed me I still felt numb. However, life goes on and I deliberately ventured into the staffroom for my morning coffee. Ray also made it a point to be present, jesting with everyone, talking about bad student behaviour and laughing about the less fortunate Goroke residents. "Can I have your attention, please," Ray called out with a big grin. "I'd like to give you an information item about school administrative changes. From this morning on, Mark Weegberg and John Bell will be in charge of the school bell. Bridget Carracher will be our new bell monitor until the end of this school year."

I nearly dropped my coffee mug. That was all he said. He ignored my glance and continued to jest with Weegberg and Bell, and then, with Robert in tow, left the staffroom for a walk around the school grounds. I had no prior warning of this change in duty roster. Why would he do this just before the end of the school year? I immediately informed Chris, the bell monitor of almost a year, that his services were not required anymore. "Why have I been sacked?" asked the Year 6 boy who had punctually carried out his duties for so long.

"I don't know, Chris," I replied. "I've also been sacked from supervising the school bell. I don't know why Bridget's been put into the job. Perhaps it's because she's the daughter of a school councillor."

That afternoon I asked John Nunn to help me in getting the regions subject advisor to the school so that my actual classwork could be objectively evaluated. I also told John that only three parents didn't like me, Gurney, Ross and Stehn. The school secretary, Julie-Ann Stehn, was right in the thick of things and I suspected that she used me as a convenient scapegoat for her own frustrations. Her problem was typical of the newly mobile group which desired above all else social status. She considered herself to be a pillar of the local community and her position as secretary/bursar at the school gave her an information advantage in fulfilling her social ambition. The trouble, however, loomed before her when she wished to send her daughter to a private school, to a school which would offer her daughter better education than that being offered by Goroke, the school of which she was an employee. Her problem centred around the resolution of this contradiction. The school was good enough to employ her, yet it was not good enough to offer her daughter an education. She told McCraw that because her daughter, Janelle, could not get along with me, she would take her out of the school and send her to private college in Hamilton.

Throughout the year I had wondered about the fact that government school employees were sending their own children to private schools. Something is terribly wrong with such thinking, though it is a fact that most private schools offer a better education than their state counterparts. All the same, the attitude, as embodied by Stehn's action, expressed a great lack of faith in the public system. The double standard claim, made by the McCraws earlier in the year, fitted into this picture as well. They already planned to send their only daughter, Kirsti, to private school.

John Nunn called back and informed me that he had spoken with Frank Peck at Staffing. He had advised him that McCraw could not simply transfer me out of Goroke. "If he does that, he'll have an enquiry on his hands," Frank Peck informed me over the phone. "The Three Union Agreement explicitly states that there are to be no forced transfers."

I was pleased to hear this and Frank assured me that I would be back at Goroke in 1984. "Just continue to do your work," John Nunn said. "I guess your pride has been hurt through this rejection."

"No, John," I replied. "It is not my pride that's hurt. It's the dishonesty of the act which makes me very sad. How can a principal lie so terribly? And the effect this has had on my wife, on my family. We intended to have more children but now my security is gone. I'm under constant pressure while other teachers are just fooling about, basking in their own laziness. Look at Mark and John. They get away with murder. Ray just fools about with them, but I have to carry all of Ray's frustrations."

My call to the Victorian Secondary Teachers Union brought some comforting words from Graeme Clay. He told me that I need not worry about the professional criticism levelled against me by the principal. He did, however, suggest that I consider transferring out of Goroke and re-establishing myself with a more 'sympathetic' principal. What on earth was going on? A sympathetic principal? Was that how one joined the state teaching service, through a sympathetic principal? Did teaching performance not matter?

* * *

End-of-year stress made itself felt not only in staff but also students. Official school work had ended a couple of weeks before the end of the school year. A number of students worked with the principal on landscaping the school gardens, and class numbers fluctuated. I made it a point to continue administering daily spelling tests. One of my more promising students, Tim Carter, refused to participate. My admonishment failed to move him and he burst into tears and rushed from the room. At recess time I received a telling-off from Ray McCraw. "It was most unprofessional of you to cause Tim to leave the room," McCraw said in disguised delight.

"But what could I do?" I asked. "He refused to work in class."

"Look, you should be more considerate towards him. We're at the end of the school year and there's no need to stress students like that."

"But I wasn't pushing too hard," I pleaded. "I just wanted him to get on with his work, and he simply refused."

"You caused a young boy to cry, to run out of the classroom. That indicates to me that you were quite unreasonable in your behaviour towards Tim."

"I've been what?" I asked in amazement.

"You've failed to take his family background into consideration," McCraw said triumphantly. "You were too severe on him. Why else would he refuse to do the work for you?"

"Are you saying that I should have let him get away with sulking and disrupting the class and not working while the other kids are?"

"That's not what I'm saying," Ray said emphatically. "You're not listening to me. I want you to handle these kids with more understanding. Anyway, I believe that you've had similar problems with students at St Arnaud High School."

"What do you mean, Ray?" I asked, sensing that this could be a fishing exercise on Ray's part.

“I mean that when students complain about you, about your behaviour, then there must be a good reason for that. Where there’s smoke, there’s fire,” he smirked.

“I make my students work hard in class. What’s wrong with that, Ray?” I threw out challengingly.

“Look, Fredrick, I’m not here to answer your questions. All I’m saying is that you’ve had trouble before at other schools.”

“But I told you that myself, without reservations. I told you of my experience at St Arnaud and at Kings Park. Are you now using this information, which I offered freely to you, against me?”

Ray remained silent. We had reached the end of our talk.

“Anything else?” Ray asked snappily.

“No,” I replied. “Is there anything you wish me to do?”

“I’ll be coming into your classes. I’ve decided to spend some time in your classes.”

“You’re welcome to do that. You know I always have an open classroom door. Anyone can walk in at any time. I have no secret classroom atmosphere, if that’s what you’re getting at.”

“If the kids behave while I’m in the classroom,” Ray added quietly, “then that’s because I’m there. If the kids continue to play up while I’m in the room, then that will show me that you lack class control.”

I walked out of Ray’s office, thinking about his final words.

The following morning I told Ray that he would not be welcome in my classroom because whatever happened during such visits would count against me. “That’s sneaky, Ray,” I said. “Tails you win, heads I lose. You said that good behaviour would prove your effectiveness while poor behaviour would prove my ineffectiveness. That’s a proposition I can’t accept. Either way, I cannot win. What are you trying to do to me?”

Ray just walked away from me, and during those final few remaining school days he did not enter my classroom. In any case, he was too busy trooping around the school grounds with a large contingent of secondary school boys and girls, planting and re-planting the new school garden.

My class sizes now varied from three to six students. It was time for playing games and wasting time, and unwinding into the school holidays. Students who didn’t belong to the principal’s shrub planting, lawn sowing or cleaning up the rubbish, simply had to sit in empty classrooms. My remnant enjoyed spending the time with me in the radio studio playing their favourite hits. During the final week all seemed sweet again and I was even invited to participate in the staff review which featured Ray, Glenn, Bruce and me in a bare-chested top hat stage act, this being the staff’s contribution to the school’s speech night held at the Peronne public hall. Our clowning about on stage was much appreciated by parents and students alike. Pub talk praised the four teachers who bared their chests and it became a guessing game who was who beneath those huge top hats. We had our chests painted so that our nipples became eyes and our navels became a part of the full-lipped mouths painted on our stomachs. Very few parents knew about the tension these four teachers had suffered for over six months.

* * *

EIGHTEEN SECOND REFERENCE

When I learned from Miss Coco that Ray had withdrawn his permanency recommendation, I requested a copy of his deferral notice form head office. The new Freedom of Information Act made such a request possible. When Ray denied me a copy of his written report on my teaching performance I likewise requested a copy from Staffing. My request was denied on ground that a release of the deferral notice, together with the October written assessment, would prejudice the principal in making any future assessment. The rejection letter also advised me that I could seek an internal review of this decision by directing my appeal to the Director of Education, Dr Norman Curry. This I did, and the Director General released the requested documents to me.

I was shattered by the two page diatribe. I could not recognise myself. It contained not a single good word about my person or my teaching ability. The assessment was out of balance, as was its purported date. It was dated 14 February 1983, yet I received the copy in the first week of January 1984. The letter was written some time at the end of October or the beginning of November 1983. Later I was to see copies of this letter with additional dates: February struck out and November inserted in handwriting. This alteration was initialled and given the date 23/11/83; February, November and October struck out and a hand written entry ‘wrong date - end of Oct ’83, and the hand-written date 14.2.84.

All this was naturally confusing to me, and it made me wonder what was going on. But all this seemed trivial when I read through the final paragraph of the letter. There it was quite clearly, a prediction warning Staffing of my person:

“If he remains at this school next year I would predict that we will have a massive problem with children, parents, students, and School Council.”

“Didn’t Ray show you the letter before he sent it off to Staffing?” John Nunn asked when I showed him the letter. He was visibly disturbed at the sight of it.

“No,” I replied, “he refused to show me anything. He said it was enough to just tell me of his decision not to recommend me for permanency.”

“It is usual for primary principals to read through an assessment with the person concerned before it is sent off to Staffing,” John said, noticeably uncomfortable. “Ray would be aware of that,” he added with a worried look.

“This is what Graeme Clay of the VSTA told me at the time, and that’s why I specifically asked for a copy of the report. I was certainly expecting him to give it to me in writing,” I said. “He gave me a copy of the original permanency recommendation.”

Quietly John began to re read the letter aloud, deliberately, word for word. Then he looked at me and said: “Well, the principal’s prediction at the end of the letter need not come to pass. Prepare yourself well for a good year’s work and this prediction will be meaningless.”

I left John’s Horsham office with some comfort because I felt John was trying to help me cope with this blow to my professional competence. It was such an unjust attack. At home I re-read the letter and I just could not accept McCraw’s judgement of my teaching performance. His letter contained exaggerations, distortions, fabrications and outright lies.

When Andrew McNair arrived at home for a brief two-day visit to the bush, I showed him McCraw's masterpiece. Andrew had spent almost 20 years within the government school system and he had been my head of department at Kings Park High School during 1981. He was always well informed on the latest department gossip, scandal or mismanagement of public funds. He knew enough about certain people to give him protection from any possible attack.

My wife, Georgina, also felt comforted by what Andrew told us about the bitchiness of department politics. His talk put into perspective what vicious minds can do to people. Andrew indicated that my problems had now begun in earnest because McCraw had committed himself in writing. The situation would now begin to develop - its direction, of course, not at all clearly delineated.

"Just remember," Andrew said, "the department will always support its officers. The logic of the bureaucracy demands that it support its principals to the end, otherwise the whole system will crumble." Andrew spoke from observed experience, though he himself had not suffered in such a manner.

"But what can I do," I lamented, "if Ray continues this push against me?"

"I don't know," he replied. "But you may well lose your job over this. What good is it having principles when you face the prospect of losing your job?"

"Yes, I know," I said. "But what alternative have I? He's locked me into his sights. Am I now to run away from him like a common thief?"

"I don't know. I knew a married couple both teaching with the department. He ran foul of someone in the bureaucracy and Staffing put him on the merry-go-round. They sent his wife to a school at one end of the state and him to the other end. They both finally resigned form the service, exactly what the bureaucracy wanted them to do in the first place."

"They could put me on the merry-go-round, couldn't they?" I asked.

"Of course," he replied. "You opt for transfer but that letter is on your personnel file. That will always be used against you. On the slightest pretext they would whip out the letter and fabricate a charge against you. And you cannot argue against it because he is a principal."

We talked for a long time and I decided that I would at least write a response to McCraw's devastating letter. I concluded my three page reply thus:

'In the light of the foregoing, what the Principal has predicted may well come to pass. I would, however, very strongly object to the assertion that I would be the cause of such problems arising. With 21 lessons per week and the student radio activity program, I shall be one of the busiest teachers on the staff at this school. There are other members of staff who fall well below this level - some are even below ten. It is my aim to carry out my duties to the best of my ability without compromising my professional standards.'

A few days later I showed John Nunn this letter. Again he slowly read it aloud, word for word. Then he looked at me rather firmly. "I don't think it is a good idea sending this off to Melbourne," he said. "I don't think it would be wise." With these words John indicated to me that my time in his office had

expired, and he opened his office door for my exit. I was puzzled, more now than before I had entered his office. Why would John oppose my placing this material on my file?

BOOK FOUR - HELP SUPPORT THE EXECUTION

NINETEEN THE NEW SCHOOL COMPLEX

The first school term in the ominously Orwellian year of 1984 began rather quietly. February is still rather hot and most days at school are interrupted by swimming trips to the local pool situated on the west side of town next to the football oval. For years Goroke's community prided itself in having an outdoor swimming pool, while the Shire Centre, Edenhope, had grubby and weed-infested Lake Wallace. For years Blands of Goroke ran a free bus service. From school through town to the pool. A few years later, when the Melbourne education bureaucracy wished to avoid any negative publicity about Goroke's school, there was a school bus which effectively cancelled Bland's years' of service. And Clive Bland was a little hurt about all this because the school didn't even thank him for his past services. This small school had its own bus, and also it had won a car in a competition. Goroke's school community could not complain about experiencing any lack of services - all except educational services. But that was a system problem.

Minor staff changes occurred at the school and they were duly noted at the beginning of term. David Hatherell had been true to his word and resigned from the Department at the end of 1983. The story was that his wife had inherited her parents' farm and that he would now become a farmer. This was untrue. David could not stand the pressure at Goroke and he had asked Frank Peck for a year's leave - without pay. Besides having him wait for over an hour outside his office, Peck refused Hatherell's request.

"We need you at Goroke in 1984. We're expecting trouble there with McCraw and Toben."

Peck didn't realise that this was the very situation Hatherell wished to escape. And escape he did. He resigned and accepted a teaching appointment at the Lutheran College in Hamilton. Later he was to re-enter the system at Hamilton Technical School, and from there he moved to Birchip, Nhill and Kaniva - where he acted as deputy principal, then back again to Nhill.

Bruce Heggie asked me what I thought of the new deputy appointment - Karen Reid and Mark Weegberg.

"I've got my own problems, Bruce," I replied. "With 21 lessons a week, and the daily radio activity, I can't afford to get involved in internal politics. In any case, I'm not really interested in administrative jobs."

"I don't know whether Karen and Mark are up to it. She's got tremendous problems herself. It shows in her excessive eating problem, and Mark, ahh …" Bruce added with a sigh. "Ahh, his drinking problem may interfere with his job."

"Perhaps," I replied. "And then there's Karen's other problem. I suppose it's a bit of gossip from Glenn," I added hesitantly, knowing though that most staff knew about it. "She literally spends thousands of dollars on phone calls to Germany where her Kenyan boyfriend is completing a PhD. But who am I to comment on such matters? I know how important it is to be able to talk to someone, especially when you are lonely - and she's a very lonely woman."

Bruce had never opened himself to such a discussion before and I bore this in mind when during the first week of the new school year I showed him the letter McCraw had sent to Staffing.

He looked at it, began reading and his eyes visibly glazed over. Then he gasped, shook his head and remained silent for a long time.

"I can't handle such things," he said, almost pleadingly. "That's the reason I got out of private enterprise." Tears welled up in his eyes.

I did not press him any further on the issue and didn't try to hold him with an Ancient Mariner gaze. I simply smiled and walked away from him.

* * *

Ann-Marie Aulsebrook, the sports mistress, had also taken off for Hamilton, there to become a teacher at the local high school. Her replacement hailed from Nhill. Peta Cumming was a healthy, solid, blond and blue-eyed woman who travelled the heavily kangaroo-infested Little Desert Goroke-Nhill road twice a day. Her husband was a caretaker of a caravan park at Nhill.

Robyn watts, the cookery teacher who had travelled the daily Horsham-Goroke road during 1983, hung up her shoes and remained in Horsham. She did not need a replacement from outside because the principal's wife, Anna, became the school's domestic science teacher. This appointment launched evil tongues on another local gossip spree.

I found it a little unsettling when two new primary teachers, Cathy Coutts and Sue Campbell, after only a few days at school, acted strangely towards me. They were noticeably distant whenever I attempted to strike up a conversation with them. I wished to visit them in their primary classes, as I had done during 1983 with all other primary staff. After a little soul-searching I gave up worrying about them. And my desire to spend what little spare time I had in the primary sector came to nought.

On the very first day of school Ray wished to speak to me.

"You have two options open to you this year, Fredrick," he said indifferently. "You can either stay at this school as a temporary teacher, or you can transfer to a larger city school and get your permanency that way. I'm not giving you permanency."

"Why not, Ray?"

"I've given you my reasons before. Nothing's changed."

"You mean the written assessment of last year?"

"I've said what I wanted to say to you," and he walked away from me.

"But what about Glenn?" I called out after him. "As you said, his work had not changed either." But he ignored my words. I simply couldn't accept his judgement of my competence. My own country-school background made me feel quite at home here and I had little desire to spent time in a larger city school. I'd battled my way through from country school to academia with moderate success. It was time to start a family, and to help those reluctant learners who needed to have learning demystified.

McCraw also didn't have one positive word of praise for me when I informed him that the radio committee had organised for Radio 3 GS' official opening the appearance of David Dalton, popular announcer from commercial radio station 3 WM. The committee organised a lunch-time barbecue to celebrate the opening and also the work they put into the station during 1983.
I didn't really expect any praise as such but those who saw me work on this project must have been aware of the continuous effort that is required to keep such an activity afloat on a daily basis.

I also overcame Ray McCraw's objections to my insistence that each student possess a personal dictionary. But it was a battle. He insisted that the class set was fine. When I threw out the mutilated dozen copies, he almost blew my top off. Luckily I had retained the worst examples to show him how the various pages containing the usual expletives were scratched, torn, scribbled over. He gave me the silent treatment when I asked for permission to write a letter to all secondary parents in which I requested them to buy a personal dictionary for their children. His silent treatment I took as a yes. The response from parents showed me that I was on the right track, that my request had not been unreasonable.

Yet such parental support did not carry any weight with McCraw. It certainly didn't alter his judgement about my purported inability to get along with parents.

No wonder, then, that he had to somehow isolate me from parents. Whenever I talked to them, they seemed to respond well to me.

A week into term Ray called me to his office.

"I'm looking at a new project involving English. I'm appointing John Bell to head a new English taskforce. I want to see him develop something quite different. Process writing has been used quite successfully overseas, particularly in the States, and it is being used in the primary sector with tremendous success. John is hoping to introduce Creative Writing into the secondary English syllabus. It will be conducted for one hour a week and we're calling it the Creative Writing Workshop. This will do a lot to lift the poor literacy level in the secondary section of the school."

"Well, what can I say?" I responded. "You've decided what's happening in English without consulting me. I can only accept your directives as such."

The ensuing silence indicated that the meeting had come to an end. Bell merely smirked at me and he had remained silent throughout the meeting.

And when the weekly school newsletter appeared on Friday, it billed John Bell as the new hero of the school whose expertise in Process Writing was to greatly benefit the whole school. The article also invited anyone interested in learning more about this revolutionary writing method - which had been such a success at primary school level - to contact John for further information.

The whole matter disturbed me. What this publicity didn't say was that from now on simple remediation had been elevated to mystical heights beyond any criticism.

After a few weeks, after the novelty wore off, and after nonsense paragraphs had appeared in the school newsletter, some of my English students participating in this program told me a few home truths.

"That's now creative writing," said Julie Anton. "That's remedial English with a different name." John's work died a natural death, no doubt because he didn't have the time to carry on with it.

* * *

The school complex really did look a pretty picture. Only a few months ago our School Council President, Kevin Johnson, had walked through the winter slush, messing up the corridors and staffroom carpet with his messy, stinking boots - and had incurred behind his back the principal's wrath.

The official opening of the new school complex had been set down for December 1983. But there was an apparent hitch and somehow things weren't going to be ready on time. The bronze plaque's inscription still had not been settled, and Mark Weegberg had been entrusted with this task.

President Kevin also attempted to convince members of School Council, meeting for the first time in 1984, in the first week of February, that a small commemorative booklet ought to be published.

"I don't think there's enough time for that to be done," Mark said, getting to his feet and blustering on. "We need at least a couple of weeks to get the information, then the typing and printing will take another couple of weeks. I don't think it can be done. "

"Why wasn't it thought of earlier?" Kevin asked in all innocence. "Who's doing the work on this anyway?"

"Council is", Mark blustered, "and you're the President."

"Well," Kevin responded challengingly, looking at the councillors sitting passively around the table, "if it depends on me and not on the sub-committee, then I'll get my act together. I've been president for five years and its just that in the last couple of years I haven't been getting the staff support needed for such a task. But I'll get the book done, just wait and see."

A hush fell over the meeting and Kevin used this pause to quickly close our first council meeting of 1984.

Afterwards he called in at our home and told me about the time problem facing him.

"Look, all I want is a memento of the opening. I've got the histories of all the schools. I just need someone to knock this stuff into shape. Will you do it, Fredrick?"

"This whole business interests me, Kevin," I said. "I must confess that this type of work is what I'm good at and I've been waiting for such an opportunity. Last year's magazine was pulled out of my hand, and Weegberg and Bell produced a real shocker. I would have been ashamed to call it a school magazine. Anyway, I didn't get asked. It's usual for the English department to do such work."

"Can you do it by next week?" Kevin asked again.

"I'll have a go. I'll get Glenn on to the illustrations. He can do the front cover and the maps and a few pictures. He's good at such work."

"All this within seven days?" Kevin asked again.

“I’ll get it done,” I assured him, and Kevin visibly relaxed, the strain of his booklet project now being taken up by me.

“I don’t know what’s going on at school,” Kevin began to confess. “What’s happening with you and Glenn? I hear Ray didn’t give you your permanency.”

“Yes,” I said. “Ray lied to us last year about our permanencies and we both don’t trust him anymore.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Kevin replied in his usual urge to help others in trouble. “I know he’s had problems with groundsman, John Hodge, and cleaner, Ruth Burns. Ray’s had lots of run-ins with a lot of people at this school. Last year he told me he was here to get rid of the deadwood, like Audrey, Jess and Joan. He also told me that you had to go because you weren’t any good. I told him that my four kids liked your English classes and that he shouldn’t get rid of you.”

“Is that why Ray doesn’t like the Goroke community, because he gets contradicted?”

“I don’t know,” Kevin replied. “Ray’s certainly not like the other principals we’ve had over these past 25 years. The old headmasters stayed at the school for years and years, then retired into the community. I don’t know. Anyway, Fred, I’ll be going now,” and Kevin made his way to the front door.

“O.K. Kevin, we’ll get it done in time for the opening of the new school buildings.” I was pleased that I had been given this task. It gave me the opportunity to illustrate how wrong McCraw had been in his assessment of my community involvement.

“Yes, get it done on time and Ray’ll have to pull his finger out the hole. Won’t that be nice?” Kevin added mischievously. “Oh, another thing,” Kevin said, pausing in the doorway. “Ray said, through his spokesman, Mark Weegberg - Ray wasn’t at the meeting - well, we were told there were no funds available for the production of a commemorative booklet. How much would it cost to produce 300 copies?”

“I don’t know, Kevin” I replied. “But I’ll use the facilities at Regional Office and John Nunn will help us.”

“Oh, John’s a good bloke,” Kevin smiled. “He’s like an uncle to all our children. Michelle calls him Uncle John.”

* * *

Within four days the commemorative booklet’s pages were ready for the printer. Glenn and I had completed the work after school, at night, without telling any staff members about it. Only once did Anna McCraw see Glenn photocopy his illustrations for the booklet. She asked him directly what he was doing, and because Glenn didn’t lie, he told her. And so a few days before the opening the secret was out and about. The following day I sensed that certain staff members regarded me in a funny light. They tended to walk past me with a sheepish grin. Mark, particularly, rushed past me without the customary hello-grunt. We worked hard on the project and when I had forgotten to type the opening date on the booklet, my wife had the unenviable task of date-stamping each copy on the Saturday evening before the Sunday opening.

On Sunday afternoon, 26 February 1984, School Council President Kevin Johnson presided over the opening of the new school complex. Newly appointed Regional Director of Education, Dr Ken Boston, had the honourable task of cutting the ribbon. Kevin stood before the large gathering and spoke about the fulfilment of an educational dream. He thanked all those who had worked so hard on this 20-year project. He mentioned the commemorative booklet which Glenn and I had produced for the occasion. It was available to all, free of charge.

He also mentioned the fact that the booklet had been produced in record time. Later in the week I hear snippets of gossip in the staffroom - something about Kevin having been 'rather nervous' during the opening ceremony. I couldn't make sense of such comments. Perhaps the well-spring was the fact that Weegberg had told Kevin that there was not enough time to produce anything.

Kevin Johnson had the distinct feeling that his services to the Goroke school was not appreciated by Ray McCraw.

* * *

1984 was thus a good productive school beginning for me. Glenn and I had also decided to work on a project 'across the subject areas' by producing a combined Year 7 book. Our inter-disciplinary effort was to be called 'A Very Short Tall Story'. It was to be an illustrated book. The text would be worked out during English classes and the drawings during art lessons.

The high level of concentration required by all students produced a certain amount of stress. Some kids didn't feel like working on the production of a class book. They grumbled for a while, until they saw it taking shape. The book also included some action shots which were developed and printed by the students.

Glenn and I were very pleased with our effort, and we donated a copy of the book to the school library. Outsiders also praised the work for its high quality.

* * *

During the first week of Term 1, I received a letter from Staffing in Melbourne. A Mr Des Lockhart advised me that my permanency application of 1983 had been unsuccessful, that I could not be granted permanency 'at this time'. However, the letter assured me that 'this does not prejudice any future application'. I rang Staffing and Mr Lockhart advised me to send in another application at the beginning of March. This I did.

TWENTY - WE'VE HAD PROBLEMS

A few members of staff congratulated us on our 32-page booklet effort. A few others sniggered at the factual errors contained on the area map. One of the schools which made up Goroke Consolidated, Dopewarra, should have been positioned nearer to Kangawall or Karnak. Similarly with Booroopke and Kalingur. Yet, to me, such matters were not too serious. After all, the announced centenary celebrations in October 1985 would see the publication of a very detailed book on the history of education in the Goroke district.

Kevin Johnson's moment of glory, of having officiated at the celebrations, was not appreciated by Ray McCraw. His open criticism of Kevin during idle chatter in the staffroom increased.

"I hear Kevin's nearly broke," he said, his bearded mask twitching with laughter.

"Oh, Ray, that wouldn't surprise me," Val Bull responded. "No wonder. He's hardly at home on the farm. I always meet him at golf."

"He's good at golf, isn't he, Val?" I asked.

"I suppose so," she replied grudgingly, knowing full well that Kevin was the best in the district.

"Betty does all the farm work. She and the kids feed the pigs while he's out golfing."

"And who does the work on your farm, Val?" I asked.

"What do you mean?" Val asked, wounded. She knew that her husband received little support from her. She was far too busy attending Catholic and Anglican church functions - always without husband.

Val looked uncomfortable and Ray had fallen into silence - a most unusual state of affairs. I sensed that I was responsible for this situation, and so I left the staffroom, leaving them to continue gossiping.

* * *

In the first week of March, Kevin Johnson chaired the final meeting of the 1983/84 school year. April was set aside for the annual council elections.

After general business, Kevin decided to confront Ray on the matter of teacher permanencies.

"Ray," he began, "why is Glenn Duncan's permanency application not coming through and why is Fredrick Toben not good enough for permanency?"

A rippling hush fell over the meeting and it was obvious that Kevin had spoken the unspeakable. McCraw nervously shuffled sheets of paper and cleared his throat.

"Kevin," he began very softly, "Glenn's got his permanency and Fredrick's case is better discussed after the meeting."

To McCraw's surprise Kevin accepted this reply and continued chairing the meeting.

"I haven't time to discuss with you all the details," Ray snapped at Kevin. "I've got to get back home. I haven't even time for a coffee. I seriously urge you to think about your own position as School Council President."

This comment stunned Kevin, who had closed the meeting, then looked forward to being filled in on what was happening about the permanency applications.

"What do you mean, Ray?" he said, alarmed at what he had just heard.

"Your own position is by no means secure," Ray gloated. "But I'll talk to you about that another day." And Ray swept out of the room leaving Kevin puzzled. But there seemed to be a common thread linking another unrelated matter. Ron Hawkins, the large district landowner, had in the past five years gladly endorsed Kevin's annual school council nomination. For over a week now Kevin had been trying to get Hawkins to do the same, without success. Ron couldn't be found anywhere, and Kevin understood this merely to reflect Hawkins' busy life-style.

On his way home to Karnak, Kevin called in at our home. I was surprised to hear what had been said at the School Council. Immediately I called Glenn, and he confirmed to Kevin that he still had not gained his permanency.

"That bastard's lying through his teeth," Kevin said in disgust. "I knew I should have pushed harder at the meeting. The truth will come out sooner or later."

Kevin vibrated with anticipation at doing battle with McCraw. He recalled how a former principal, Alan Rogers, had fought hard against the Melbourne-based education bureaucracy to retain secondary education at Goroke. McCraw seemed to be the antithesis to Rogers. McCraw saw things differently, and it was his self-appointed task to make the community see it his way.

The following afternoon Kevin was again in town on business. He had parked his car outside the hotel, then gone off on foot to do his jobs. It was early evening before he returned to his car, and to his surprise he saw Ray McCraw walking out of Jack's shop carrying a carton of milk.

"Ray, got a moment?" Kevin called out, and to his surprise McCraw came over and sat in the front seat.

"Ray, what's this about how I've gotta watch my position?"

"Well, Kevin," Ray began in his velvety voice, making himself comfortable. "You asked me some very uncomfortable questions the other night. I don't like to be put on the spot by you, or anyone for that matter." His voice began to sound firmer, almost threatening.

"Why aren't you talking about the permanencies," Kevin persisted. "Bell's got his and usually this would have been publicised at Council meeting. I see nothing wrong in publicising permanencies.

Fredrick's a good English teacher. My kids all like him and I spent last Open Day in his classroom, and he was excellent."

"Kevin, I'm telling you in confidence now that Fredrick's had problems at other schools before he came to Goroke. He just can't get along with kids. He's a trouble maker who unsettles the kids. They then get rude and cheeky and class discipline breaks down."

"That's stupid," Kevin said in his blunt but honest way. "He's helped the community by producing the commemorative booklet. You lot didn't do a thing to help me with that. Hadn't it been for him we wouldn't have had a booklet because you deliberately sabotaged the project." Kevin was now ready to speak his mind, to address more home truths.

"Look, Kevin," Ray said, also heating up. "You've caused enough trouble already. I may as well tell you right now. I've told Ron Hawkins that I won't serve under your presidency. If you get re-elected, I'll refuse to serve as principal of this school."

Kevin was stunned. What he had sensed for some time now had now been expressed in words. Only a feeble "Why, Ray?" escaped his lips.

"You've done nothing but stir in the school. You've upset so many councillors with your wild talk and ideas."

"I got the school its new buildings, Ray. You can't take that away from me." Kevin sat behind the wheel wondering where this talk would lead.

"That's not the point, Kevin. Anyway, Regional Office had a lot to do with the final OK on the building plans. Ray was smiling now. "Kevin, if you re-nominate, I'll quit my job as principal."

With these words Ray jumped from Kevin's car and walked home. Kevin, stunned by this turn of events, started his car and slowly drove home to Karnak, all the time wondering whether his five years as School Council President had been worth while.

* * *

A brittle air hung over the April School Council meeting. Outgoing Council members met for the first time in the new staffroom. Members expected problems between Ray and Kevin because the gossip mill had been working overtime.

Kevin Johnson had problems getting his nomination of the ground. Ron Hawkins had finally declined to sign the nomination form, this after five consecutive years. Kevin couldn't understand why Ron had done this to him. He was still puzzled by all this when he opened the Council meeting, then declared all positions vacant and called for nominations of new office bearers.

A hush, a deafening silence broke out, but not for long. Mark Weegberg, former teacher representative on School Council, jumped and blustered: "I nominate Geoff Carracher for president."

To his dismay and great embarrassment, Geoff Carracher modestly declined on the grounds of having to attend to too many business commitments. His presidency of the local football league sapped all his energy.

Mark again jumped up. “I nominate Ron Hawkins for president,” he almost shouted, as if his own life depended upon this nomination.

But Ron, too, declined because his family property needed his attention. Geoff Carracher, like Kevin Johnson, was also a Hawkins protégé.

Then someone else called out: “I nominate Mac Hausler for vice-president.”

Malcolm accepted the position without fuss because he knew that it was a nominal position not requiring anything of him. He liked to be with it but not in front. There was still the president’s position - Kevin was waiting for someone to do him the honours. But nothing happened. No-one nominated Kevin because they knew he would accept the position just to get even with ‘Whiskers’. All former School Council members had a sudden failure of moral courage. They all forgot that Kevin had served them well for many years, the last five as president. But the past had been forgotten and in this Orwellian Year of 1984 Kevin’s past conveniently slipped down the memory hole.

The embarrassed silence ended when someone nominated newsagent Edwin Mitchell to the presidency. Mitchell gladly accepted the job, though he did make it clear to all that his political activity would prevent him from attending the odd Council meeting.

And so once again the Goroke Consolidated School Council became constitutional and operational for another 12 months. Once the President had been chosen, the other positions were filled without a hitch.

TWENTY - ONE SERIOUS CONTRADICTIONS

Glenn was wary over what Kevin Johnson had said about his permanency success. At lunch-time the following day he used our home telephone and rang Staffing.

"We are awaiting a report from the principal," a Mr Des Lockhart told Duncan. "It must be supported by a positive evidence of an unequivocal nature."

Glenn and I remained confused. What was happening? How could a person's livelihood be treated to lightly? The bureaucracy, the people who filled its positions, seemed to delight in hurting people. Why?

Glenn wasn't satisfied with the contradictory information he had received from Lockhart and so he decided to speak to McCraw about it.

"We'll ring staffing right now," McCraw said threateningly, "and settle the matter once and for all." Glenn smiled at McCraw's response because this was exactly what he had hoped for. Yet, after spending over an hour on the telephone, talking to Des Lockhart, Glenn was none the wiser, and he told McCraw this in no uncertain terms - not to his face as an emotional outburst but rather in more permanent and rational form. That evening he put pen to paper and composed a classic *J'acuse.*

"The reason I have written this letter is to point out the inconsistencies that have arisen throughout my quest for permanency over the past year.

1. I applied for permanency at the start of second term last year.

2. Out of the three who applied for permanency only one obtained it. John Bell told me and others he received permanency early in second term.

3. I asked the principal during second term why it was taking so long. He replied it was the political situation. The same statement was given to Fredrick.

4. At the beginning of third term I rang Staffing and asked for clarification. I was told permanency had not been granted and that they were waiting for another principal's report at the end of October.

4.1 At this point I found Fredrick was having similar problems. McCraw had withdrawn his earlier recommendation without having told Fredrick that he had done so.

4.2 McCraw also told me for the first time that my classes were too loud, and made other negative comments.

5. I confronted McCraw again about permanency and he repeated the same excuse, that it was the political/economic situation due to government cuts in the budget. I regarded that as a blatant lie, and still do.

6. At the beginning of October, Ray McCraw showed me a report form from staffing which explained what criteria were required for permanency assessment.

7. Later in third term McCraw explained that he had to write another report for permanency and expressed a desire to observe my classes to decide whether my discipline problems had improved. I felt that despite the disruptions caused by his presence, the students' work output and behaviour were very good. McCraw wrote a brief comment which was not negative and he explained that this would get me permanency at the start of this year.

8. When McCraw told School Council that I had got permanency I rang Staffing because I had not been told officially about it. I was told that my control card required another principal's report in May of this year. I was also told that as soon as a principal grants permanency it should pass through their hands in a couple of weeks. No hold-ups or complications.

9. I told Fredrick about it and we phoned again to have all this confirmed by a man this time. We were also told that:
i. The principal receives the letter advising a teacher of gaining permanency.
ii. Permanency is publicised via the principal.

10. When Ray McCraw rang staffing and spoke to second in command, an interesting contradiction occurred: To both questions we received a 'yes' answer:
i. Can a principal remain uninformed if one of his staff gained permanency?
ii. Can staffing withhold permanency even if it is recommended by the principal?

It is because of this that I write my doubt about Ray McCraw's honesty.

1. I have doubts about Ray's honesty because for one year he has questioned my ability to the Department.

2. Had I not had doubts about his honesty and integrity, I could never have found out all the circumstances surrounding the permanency issue.

2.1 He expects me to believe he has done everything possible to support my application. This means not bothering to find out what has happened. He sets himself up as an omnipotent judge. His thinking appears to be that he makes out he's doing everything for you and he is not!
'I did my bit' - 'Blame the anonymous Department' (A bureaucrat hides behind regulations).

3. A principal should be fair and just about his staff's welfare, especially on such an important issue as permanency. He has expressed this concern in reassuring words but his knowledge of the situation and his actions showed otherwise.

4. Matters arising out of the discussion on Friday, in the office after school, consisted of the following:
i. I mentioned to Ray, regardless of the situation, you said to the school council meeting that I had permanency. Anyone who was there would see that as a blatant lie.
His reply: a) 'I couldn't give a stuff!' and his excuse was b) 'I acted on good faith', and also c) 'I said that because I assumed it would happen', and most importantly d) 'Oh, I didn't know that. I'll know next time'.

ii. I explained to Ray: 'Your ignorance cost me my permanency'. He disagreed with this!? In my opinion it is a fact that he cannot acknowledge ignorance or error.

Everything I have rung up and told him about he doesn't appear to know. A person's career is such a big thing. He treats it very casually - of little importance - it appears that he hasn't put thought into it!
Or perhaps he is an experienced tactician who has planned all this - premeditated tactics - 'wearing down the opposition', because Fredrick and I are not the YES-MEN, etc.

These are my doubts:
A principal who respects his position and staff would go to the trouble of learning the rules. He is learning at Fredrick's and my expense.
The simple fact of ignorance is not an excuse - it means he is not sincerely interested in what he is doing. My major doubts come about because I don't believe he is as ignorant as he makes out to be. If it isn't ignorance, that is worse - it is then pre-meditated dishonesty.

5. I also have doubts on what I see as his obsession with control and discipline. All of his criticism of me has been on student discipline and that has been exaggerated, in my opinion. I don't believe I have a problem to the degree that it stops me from gaining permanency.
Ray totally ignores the important facts that a high degree of meaningful learning is taking place and a high output of work is being achieved.
The 'control' issue is so wishy-washy you can prove anything you want to prove. I could criticise any teacher in a classroom-situation. It doesn't prove a thing. I am suitable for permanency now and I know it.

6. As a professional, ignorance shouldn't come into it, and on this basis I question his ability to judge me. He plays on the basis that he doesn't know. He hasn't informed himself of the whole procedure.

Is he taking the matter so lightly that two men's careers are under question due to his lack of professionalism in not knowing or attempting to find out what a principal must be expected to know?
If he is this incompetent, is he competent enough to assess a secondary teacher for permanency?

7. In my opinion the power politics played by Ray McCraw is one of control because it is expressed all the time. Dictators wish to control. You cannot control in art or literature. Once you do, it ceases to be an artistic expression.

8. It is my belief that in the education system, students' minds must be exercised and developed with high ethical standards of honesty, truth and intellectual 'guts'. Such things as lies and 'beating around the bush' are not confronting problems head-on . They are, in my opinion, based on fear and a ruthless, pathetic and undisciplined type of mental intellect. It typifies what the social manipulators and mental midgets are made of.

9. He has told me before that I have been overreacting or have misinterpreted the situation and that he hasn't done a thing that warrants questioning. He continues to explain the situation away by saying it is my naive nature or ignorance that causes me to think this way.
But I can never remember him considering serious self-reflection, even after the in-service when his adaptive-dealing blind spot was exposed - 1429.

Ray attempts to justify it away by saying those scores were very broad, generalities, very ambiguous, etc.

10. The facts, as far as I am concerned, are simple. For over a year now I have been told I would be getting permanency and I still have not got it. It appears that Ray does not wish to give me permanency, not because I am incompetent but because he does not like me.
I believe this is a personality conflict. I am disgusted by the way it has all been handled.

Glenn Duncan.

Glenn and I read through the draft a couple of times and I was impressed by his courage to also put things in writing. After all, how shameful it is for a person to lack the courage to speak out. Wasn't this the charge laid against the German nation after World War II, that the Germans didn't know anything about the gas ovens? Why didn't the Germans speak out? Now we know why - because the whole gassing story was a part of war propaganda. Didn't I hear the story during the 50s at primary school that Japanese women had a horizontal vagina? Oh, but for the love of truth, where would world history be right now?

School history, as I was to learn later, also had an element of distortion. School Council records never mentioned the late 60s-early 70s attempts by the Department of Education to close the secondary section of the Goroke school. Was it not important enough as a recorded event in the history of education at Goroke? I thought so but others didn't. My view prevailed, not because I successfully swayed the opposition but because I wrote and published a book on this topic.

TWENTY - TWO HELP IS OFFERED

On Monday morning, 19 March, the weekly quote on my classroom board read:
Minds are like parachutes; they only function when open!

While I was writing this, Glenn entered my classroom.

"Ten minutes before morning assembly," he said, "Come on, shake a leg."

"I'll be on time, Glenn. Ever seen me late?"

"I don't want you to miss the opening moments," he said gleefully. "I just gave Ray the letter."

"Well, I've also got something for him," I said. "I've decided to withdraw my second permanency application and the reason I'm giving him is that because of your permanency mess I cannot trust him any more. He's corrupt and he lies and he's just playing a game with us. Why should he make his mistakes at our expense?"

"Good," was all Glenn said as he dashed off outside.

The assembly began as usual with Val providing a recorded version of Advance Australia Fair, followed by the old but still relevant dedication: 'I love God and my country; I'll honour the flag; I'll serve the Queen; and cheerfully obey my parents, teachers and the law'.

Weegberg and Bell would inevitably snigger at the reference to the Queen, and some student would noticeably smirk at the teacher-obedience bit. I knew why they reacted like that. How could students respect some of the teachers - especially those who didn't even bother to set a personal example to their students?

Ray was his usual self with additional buoyancy.

I had a spare lesson during period 3 and decided to give him my letter of withdrawal. Tex Drummond, the officer in charge of Goroke's one-man police station, was talking to Ray in his office. I excused my interruption and handed Ray my letter.

At lunch time Ray wished to talk to me about my massive disciplinary problems. I maintained that my problems were no more serious than Weegberg's, Bell's, Duncan's, Ferlazzo's, even Heggie's. This attitude of mine therefore terminated the discussion after the first five minutes.

At the end of the school day Julie-Ann handed me a letter from Ray:
"Following our meeting at 1.50 p.m. today I would like to put again the suggestion that you avail yourself of some help to overcome what appears to be a problem between yourself and the Year 9 students.
You have 3 avenues of support within the school:

1. Myself.
2. The Staff Support Group.
3. The video camera and ancillary equipment would allow you to record lessons and to review that lesson quietly and in private.

Yours faithfully, Ray."

I considered the letter, then smiled at myself because it was so obvious that now the bureaucratic machinery had begun to turn. After bus duty I sought out Ray who was still in his office.

"Ray, the video idea is odd, isn't it? Why would you wish to record my apparently poor lessons?"

"The video will help you develop better teaching techniques," he replied. "We can all look at your performance and then give you help in how you can improve your teaching skills."

"That's odd, Ray," I replied. "Instead of recording my lessons and my colleagues finding fault with them, wouldn't it be better to go about this the other way round? Should you not present me with a video recording of a successful teacher's performance in the classroom? This would give me an opportunity of modelling myself on such expert teacher's performance. Why don't we record Robert's lessons? What about Mark's and John's lessons?"

"We can help you with your problems, Fredrick," he continued, ignoring my suggestions. "Believe me, we can help you overcome your massive teaching problems."

Ray sounded so sincere that I almost accepted his offer, that I almost believed I did have massive problems. However, recent events soon brought me back to reality.

"I'd like to speak to John Nunn. It just doesn't make sense to me that John Bell and now Glenn Duncan have got their permanency when their classes are just as good or bad as mine."

"Do what you like," Ray snapped, and strolled into Julie-Ann's office.

Again I saw John Nunn in Horsham.

"John, who controls Ray McCraw?" I asked. "Who can stop this man from hounding me like that?"

"Well, only the Regional Director can do that," he replied haltingly. "It's Dr Ken Boston in Ballaarat."

"You mean the man who opened Goroke's new school complex in February?"

"Yes. I can only advise you in a pastoral sense. I have no power over the principal. My role is merely that of an adviser."

"Then please bring the Regional Director to the school, John," I almost pleaded. "The principal has lied to us and he's also lied to School Council. Dr Boston must know about this. And I'd personally like to ask him why Dennis Bolster, the region's subject adviser, isn't helping me. I've been trying to get him to come out to Goroke since October last year so that he can have a look at my class work. But he always seems too busy."

"I'll speak to Dr Boston," John said in a measured, deliberate tone. "I'll see you later then. How's your wife and son?" he added as he opened his office door.

"The strain is telling on the family, John. For their sake, please, John, help me overcome this nonsense."

"Give your wife my regards," John said. "We'll see you soon."

I was exhausted and I wondered how John could maintain that nice, almost disinterested but warm style. This ex-inspector of schools had lost his position when union politics eliminated the school inspectorate the year before. Now John was a mere counsellor who could only make recommendations.

A few day later I was called to the principal's office where the Regional Director awaited me.

"I just wish to gauge the strength of feelings in this situation - how strongly you feel about it all," he said in a firm tone from behind the principal's desk. "John's filled me in on the situation and it appears to me there are other factors influencing the matter. There's a Lady Macbeth here as well - too much vaulting ambition. Have you considered a transfer from this school?"

"That's very difficult at this stage," I replied. "The matter has already gone into the local community. Last year rumour had it that the principal wanted to get rid of me because I was not a good English teacher. If I transfer now, then I would be sending out the signal that the principal's assessment was correct. That's why I want Dennis Bolster, the region's subject advisor, to come into the school and evaluate my classwork."

Boston remained silent for a while. John Nunn sat next to him, in silence. "The other alternative is an enquiry," he almost sighed. "I haven't conducted one before. It would be my first one since assuming the Director's position. But I'm still hoping we can settle this dispute long before that course of action is adopted."

I felt helpless and I was now in Boston's hands. "Why haven't I received help from outside the school?" I asked without expecting an answer. Why is my student's work-output not being evaluated?"

Boston remained silent and I received the distinct impression that it was time for me to go.

"I think the meeting has been valuable," Boston said addressing Nunn. "We'll be in touch, Don't hesitate to contact me if there's anything I can do for you."

He stood up and offered me his hand.

The following week well-known education adviser, Dr Michael Norman, arrived at the school to address School Council on matters concerning educational changes coming from the top. He also spent some time in the principal's office.

* * *

On Tuesday, 26 June, Ray rushed into my classroom, frothing badly at the mouth, Karen Reid following hot on his heels. I blessed myself for not having any students in the classroom. How unusual, I thought to myself, for Ray to come into the classroom when it's empty of kids. Usually it's the other way round. Before I could let my thoughts wander any further I heard Ray's breathless gasping message:

"I'm here to inform you that you have refused to accept my help. I'm going to get you out of this school, for your own sake."
"What's this, Ray?" I said, almost in jest. "I didn't refuse your help, nor am I a bad teacher. I just want you to get off my back and stop this gossip that you're about to sack me. That's the local gossip in the pub. Where does this come from, Ray, if not from yourself?"

While Ray and I talked Karen wrote profusely. Her written record was later submitted to the Support Group Report. It was designed to prove that I had been fully informed of what was going on. This was supposed to be a fulfilment of natural justice.

"June 26th 11:36 a.m.
I witnessed a discussion between Ray & Fredrick.
Ray stated that he had tried to help Fred and Fredrick had refused all help & had in fact insulted Ray, & questioned his motives.
Therefore Ray was writing to Staffing Office to ask for Fredrick's transfer to a larger school (to protect Fredrick's interest). If this could not take place immediately at least at the end of the year. If Staffing Office replied that they could not achieve this, then Ray would initiate dismissal proceedings.

These being 1) Official Notification of Dismissal Proceedings against Frederick
2) The setting up of a staff task force to help Fredrick for a minimum of 1 month
3) If Ray decides that dismissal proceedings need to be continued then an Official Enquiry (sp) to begin, requiring written submission from both Ray & Fredrick.

Ray stated his need to totally inform Fredrick of his intentions.
Fredrick stated that he did not refuse help, that he questioned Ray's motives. He stated that his job is to correct language & that this he had done. That he does not take part in intrigue; but others (nameless but implied) in the school did. That he was not 'taking on' Ray. That Ray had used similar tactics (of threats) to depose a former School Council President.
Ray did not reply to the statements, but informed Fredrick of his wish to make sure Fredrick was aware of all his intentions.

Karen J. Reid."

Both Ray and Karen left my classroom the way they had entered it - swiftly, as if I had some kind of infectious disease.

How ridiculous the whole situation really was hit home at that afternoon's staff meeting. Anna McCraw had placed on the agenda an information item: 'unruly nature of Year 8'. When the meeting came to discuss it she told staff that her domestic science class was quite badly behaved.

"Anna, that's funny," I offered my help. "I have no problems with my Year 8 English class. They're hard-working most of the time. This must be your personal problem, Anna."

I then briefly informed the meeting of what had happened that morning before lunch. Colleagues froze. They didn't want to hear anything like that. They wanted to hear Anna talk about her disciplinary problems, not hear about my personal problems with McCraw.

And so, my so-called class problems were a result of my poor teaching skills while Anna's were a direct result of poor student behaviour. When I told my wife about this nonsense, she froze into silence for the evening.

TWENTY THREE - OFFICIAL COMPLAINT CONFIRMED

Eight weeks before the end of Term II, the principal made a grave announcement. At the 26 June staff meeting McCraw publicly informed everyone that I had been declared incompetent and that a support group would be formed to help me with my 'massive teaching problems'.

I objected to the way the whole matter was put and although McCraw tried to silence me - as he had been trying for over a year - I did have my say.

"I would just like you all to know that my teaching problems are no worse than your own. I have students who play up in my classes - so have you. They may not be the same but we all have disciplinary problems. It certainly does not warrant my being singled out for some special treatment which Ray euphemistically calls 'support'. Ray has already told some parents and teachers that he wants to remove me from the school. Karen witnessed this fact this morning. I charge Ray with spreading the seeds of discourse by generating gossip about his intentions, and about my work at this school. There is pub-talk about Ray needing help from School Council to get me out of this school. I view this as being symptomatic of our on-going personality clash. I dispute Ray's assessment of my teaching competence. But all I can do is to submit to whatever he has in store for me."

Discomfort rippled through the meeting. No-one really believed that I was an incompetent teacher, and most colleagues wished to stay out of the dispute - all except Weegberg, Bell and Ferlazzo. They smirked and giggled like little boys.

* * *

On Monday, 2nd of July, the principal handed me his formal statement of complaint. I glanced at the two pages, then mused to myself. Somehow it seemed familiar. I had read most of this before. I checked my file and sure enough the complaint was a mere re-structured version of the oddly-dated 14 February 1983 letter of complaint, the letter which made the grave prediction:

'If he remains at this school next year I would predict that we will have a massive problem with Children, parents, students and School Council.'

Now, it seemed, the internal logic of his present action against me would connect with his earlier prediction. The mere fact of my addressing the staff meeting could be seen as an attempt at undermining the principal's authority. Any disagreement with him could be seen as insubordination. Any form of defence raised by me, or others on my behalf, would lock us into battle from which the principal would have to emerge victorious. He couldn't be seen to lose because his position embodied too much. He had already given some teachers permanency status. Were he now to be proven wrong, then his own competence would have to be questioned. Could the system afford such a show-down?

The official complaint began thus:

"Dr G F Toben

In accordance with the provisions of the agreement between the Government of Victoria and the three teacher union, Part 1. Memorandum of Agreement Section 3, "Discipline and Dismissal Procedures" subsection 3.2, clause 3.2.1, I wish to communicate to you the areas of your role at this school where I believe your performance to be less than satisfactory.

1. Classroom Discipline and Management.
Whilst you are teaching and supervising, the children are unruly, noisy and not working. This is exhibited by their calling out across the room to each other, the cheeky tone of voice used and the answering back to you that occurs. Your efforts at changing have been ineffective. You now appear to just accept this and continue talking over the top of it.
The management techniques you have shown are insufficient and have contributed to your difficulties; isolating yourself at your table for the greater portion of the lesson or with one or two children does not allow you to observe the activities of the children or the effectiveness of their work.

2. Communication Skills.
The children have complained to me several times that they cannot understand many of the words you use in your classes. I have observed this in several visits to your classes. Your explanations are sometimes confusing and fail to make your point, leaving the children without the answer to their questions or with insufficient information on which to make decisions about their work, or on which to continue. The lack of rapport between you and the children makes it more difficult for you to get your message across. This is apparent when the children loudly dispute the points you make when you are disciplining them. Your habit of talking over the noise also means that meaningful communication cannot take place.

3. Relationship between the students and you as a teacher.
A very poor relationship exists between you and most students. This has arisen because of your discipline confusion, and their feelings that many of the statements you make to them are hurtful, sarcastic, or without foundation. When you are making a point about behaviour they feel "harangued", or blamed for something that someone else did. There appears to be a lack of trust in you and an unwillingness to accept your points of view. The fact that you instigate discussions on contentious issues and then "debate" their points away would contribute to this, and lead to a lack of control of your discussions. This is exhibited in the way children "discuss" things in a cheeky, disrespectful manner, making pointless, outrageous statements to "lead you on" during class.
The children feel that you administer your discipline differently according to the person(s) involved and that you are not consistent across the class. The number of times you felt it necessary to keep children in at lunch and recess times indicates that all is not well and also that this technique is ineffective for you.
There exists a feeling of conflict between the children and yourself in many classes.

4. Evaluation.
Your reliance on a rigid marking system as your main/only method of evaluation causes many problems. You use the marks gained as a method of grading students; as a basis for interviews and comments about them; make them vitally important in your management technique and indicate success/failure to the children though their use. This appears to be the only method of evaluation used. It appears that it is evaluation on immediate work only and has no modification on what you will teach in future. There appears to be no evaluation on what has been retained by the children or on the effectiveness of your teaching methods.
The reliance on "lots of marks" is also a source of conflict - the children are aware of the fact that you are not consistent between children in your marking system and that you differentiate between groups - allowing some children to copy whilst correcting - and still count the work - accepting a much lower standard of work from others whilst giving them the same mark.
A great deal of confusion about your evaluation exists in the minds of the children.
I, too, question your ability to evaluate the standards of children when you tell me that all children, with the exception of Kerry and Barbara, are of a satisfactory standard for their year, and use this as a basis for saying they do not need extra help.
The insistence that all children complete the same level and amount of work also indicated an unwillingness to consider their individual needs during class.

5. Teaching Methods.
You have used several teaching methods in your classes - lecture method, group work, individual work, free approach, and there appear to be problems with all of them - the level of noise is too high and the work being produced at the time of low standard (because of the lack of effort the children are putting into it).
The fact that all children are expected to function at the same level and speed contributes to this, and not even the threat of no mark or a low mark enthuses them.
Quite often the topics for the discussions are inappropriate to the class/age level and the level on which they are led encourages conflict or nonsense - e.g. the discussion on "Private Schools" - statements from you such as "The teachers work much harder there" and "The standards are a lot higher" caused a great deal of hostility and resentment amongst students that was not explained or treated.

6. Relationship between staff members and yourself.

An extremely poor relationship exists between yourself and most of the Secondary Staff. This affects their ability to work with you, has a detrimental effect on the running of the school and is divisive on such a small staff as this.

Included with this statement please find a copy of the appropriate part of the "Agreement" which outlines the procedures which are to be followed in cases such as this. Accordingly I invite you to respond to my statement. I request that you bring another member of staff with you when you respond. A suitable time would be Thursday, 5th July - period 4. If you let me know the name of your accompanying staff member, I will arrange to have them released from teaching duties.

R.A McCraw, Principal.

Ray had handed me this letter at recess time. He'd found me in the double room where I was busy with the Book Week Fair, the activity he had tried to sabotage. Ray had actually telephoned the Adelaide book company which had made the school this wonderful Book Fair offer. At their cost, they would send us five boxes of books, ranging in interest from Prep to Senior School level. They would provide promotional material, such as balloons and streamers and posters. All the school needed to do was set up the fair and try to sell as many books as possible. Out of the total sales the school would then receive 10%.

I asked Ray whether I could go ahead with this offer, and he consented.

On the Friday, the last working school day before the Book Fair was to commence, I had not received the promised boxes. I rang the company in Adelaide and to my surprise was told that the principal had cancelled all arrangements. I protested, telling the lady at the other end that this must have been a mistake because I had already run a mini publicity campaign to announce the coming Book Fair. She expressed astonishment, especially because the five boxes were still in her office, waiting to be sent to Goroke. And this is what she did - she sent off the boxes in the hope that they would arrive at the school by Monday morning.

As it turned out, our Saturday morning paper and mail service collected the boxes at Horsham and dropped them off at the school that very morning. Then, together with a number of my students, mainly the Blythman boys, we managed to spend Saturday and Sunday in the double room, preparing the Book Fair for the following Monday.

The boys enjoyed blowing up the balloons and hanging up streamers. It was outside school time, and much enjoyed by all.

The whole Goroke community participated in this activity - to officially celebrate BOOK WEEK. Students and teachers entered the room, browsed and bought, and talked books. At the end of the week my Year 7 students put on a book costume parade, where they dressed up as their favourite character.

Most members of staff congratulated me on the success of the fair. Later the principal would report to School Council that the Book Fair had gained for the school "a refund of $70". This was, of course, a distortion because the $70 was pure profit, later to be spent by the English department on purchasing some good novels. Why would Ray have stated to School Council that it was a 'refund'?

* * *

On Wednesday, 4 July, I responded to Ray's formal complaint.

"Dear Raymond
I thank you for your letter of 2 July 1984 - and as with all your letters, you begin with half-truths and then become more and more outrageous.

The first two points of your letter contain an element of truth, though the points I have problems with are certainly not worthy of a transfer or dismissal. You begin with a half-truth, then expand upon it - using its own internal logic - until it becomes a twisted interpretation of the facts.
For example, Point 3: Who are 'most' of the students and what are the problems that have arisen between us? Are these worthy of a transfer or dismissal? I could ask these questions repeatedly throughout the letter.
Point 4: I have already explained to you the complexity of language evaluation, and you have misquoted me before. If you wish me to clarify these points again, I shall do so.
Point 5: Again, you are assuming things that on the surface appear to be a true analysis of a teaching method, but which is really only half the story. You have simplified the facts to the point of absurdity. As with the other points, what have I done in the eighteen months that I have been at this school to deserve a transfer or dismissal?
As usual your letter ends with the most ambiguous and absurd observation. You believe 'an extremely poor relationship exists between yourself and most of the secondary staff. This affects their ability to work with you, has a detrimental effect on the running of the school and is divisive on such a small staff as this'.
If this is true, who are 'most' of the secondary staff that have 'an extremely poor relationship' with me? I want names and I want the problems that have occurred between us clearly written down in point-form so that I have a chance of responding to them.
How does 'this' affect their ability to work with me? How is it a detrimental effect on the running of the school? How is it divisive on such a small staff as this? Again, as in your other letters, you have left the last paragraph to gibe an unjustified attack upon my person and my professionalism, without having backed it up in any way.
In the final paragraph you come out with what is bothering you. With my qualifications and experience you are forced to question and justify what you are doing. There is nothing wrong in this, particularly when you are encouraging an open system of communication. My teaching competence is of secondary importance to you - it is my presence on the staff that bothers you. Why? And you go to ridiculous lengths to discredit me professionally and personally.
as a final comment and in relation to the spirit of 'open communications', I am amazed at your ignorance in the open-minded, honest-way of thinking and dealing with people. For example, if we are using an open system of communication (e.g. staff meetings use the Flynn STP model), how can my presence be divisive on such a small staff?
I firmly believe that such thoughts are a product of an unreasonable mind. Where do these ideas come from? If adults are affected by my presence, then there is a great problem within our system of education. 'Divisive' tension, as I understand it, is a strength of our pluralistic democracy - it does not pull apart because through the embodied 'openness', it derives self-corrective elements from such a tension.
It frightens me that you do not appear to understand the working of this process.

Sincerely G F Toben."

That morning, before school, I handed Ray the letter.

"Ray, I need to know who 'most' of the secondary staff are that have a problem in communicating with me. Can you give me the names, please?" He looked at me and remained silent. "And I would like to know who 'most' of the students are." And still he refused to speak to me. "Ray, you're not talking. Give me permission to ask individual staff members. I'll put this on the notice board as an information item."

"Do what you like," he barked at me and slammed shut his office door.

I assumed that this did not forbid me to communicate my concerns with staff members. I placed portions of Points 3 and 6 on the notice board in the staffroom, and to ensure that I could not be accused of giving a distorted picture of my reply, I placed a copy of my letter next to the highlighted material.

The following morning, before lunch, at the appointed time, I again arrived at Ray's office. It was the preliminary meeting of the support group members. Robert Ferlazzo was absent but Karen Reid and Bruce Heggie were already talking to Ray.

"We're here to help you overcome your teaching problems. I want you to understand this, Fredrick. We all want to help you," he began in a sickly-sweet voice.

“But, Ray, I don’t need your help in such formal manner. “My problems are no more serious than those of other staff members. I simply require you to stop gossiping so negatively about me. I do not intend to get to that level myself in order to combat it. I’m not interested in getting involved in such things. I’m too busy teaching.”

“We’re conducting this support group according to the Three-Union Agreement between the Ministry and the unions. You have a right to bring on to the support group your own representative selected from among the staff of this school,” Ray continued, without answering me.

“But if I bring anyone along,” I said, “then this would only begin a polarisation process among the staff. That’s exactly what I’m trying to avoid. You can then use this as evidence to prove your point that I’m unsettling the school’s staff.”

“You have this right,” he continued mechanically, “and we’re here to help you overcome your teaching problems.”

“Anyone mind if I record these proceedings?” I asked.

“I don’t mind,” Ray rushed in.

“Doesn’t bother me,” Karen replied, laughing nervously.

“Don’t mind,” Bruce mumbled.

“We’ll keep informal minutes of our Friday de-briefing meetings,” Ray added, “and we’ll meet again next Monday afternoon. Thanks folks,” he charmed, “that’s it until next week.”

I left the principal’s office with some indifference. The fraud of it all hit me when I read a letter I’d received from Kaye Nolan, Executive Officer, Post Primary English Committee, Education Department, dated 6 July.

“The Post-Primary English committee has asked me to write congratulating you on the production of your wonderful book. It was tabled at the last general meeting of the Committee and we were all impressed by the story, artwork and quality of its production. It has obviously taken a great deal of time and work to put together and the result has been well worth it.”

In May I had also received a letter from Alan Mayberry, in charge of Student Publications within the Curriculum Branch of the Education Department. He congratulated Year 7 for its fine publishing effort ‘A Very Short Tall Story’, adding “I was most impressed by its presentation”.

So, what was McCraw on about? Why had he never praised the work I was doing in my classes? He never mentioned anything positive and his whole approach was simply too unbalanced.

That evening I told my wife about the new activity at school which was going to help me with my ‘massive teaching problems’.

“As if I haven’t got enough work already with my 21 periods. Now I have to fend-off this cannibalistic, vulture-like activity where others are maturing at my expense.

"Surely it can't be all that bad," she replied.

"Can you imagine these people being objective and impartial? Their own careers hinge on supporting the principal. The support group is there merely to confirm what a year's vindictive gossip has already predicted - my removal from school. The support group is another name for an execution group. The principal's reputation is at stake here. He cannot be seen to lose because if he does, he would lose face. He's already made too many predictions. People now want to see his power in action. If he loses he'll be seen to be impotent."

"Perhaps you should have kept quiet a bit more," my wife chided me ever-so-gently.

"What did I do or say to upset Ray?"

"Perhaps it's just the way present yourself," she said. "The other male teachers are a bit on the scruffy side and Ray's not a well-dressed person, is he?"

"Do you really think it would have made a difference, had I walked about in tattered clothes?"

"The school's got no policy on dress, has it?"

"That's not the issue being addressed next week. They're looking at my classroom performance. Then again, that's a sort of presentation issue, isn't it?"

"I know," she said, "but just like in nursing, at the Health Centre, it is important to look neat and tidy." Georgian's training, as well as her home background, had made her aware of the importance of education, behaviour and dress-sense. She had been quite shocked by what she had see of staff-dress in Victoria's schools.

We talked some more and then enjoyed one another's company for a while until our son, Karl, had to be put to bed.

* * *

The successful Book Week Fair gave me a much-needed morale booster. The radio activity continued without interruption, though there was a murmur about too many students being unsupervised in the studio. My spelling sessions, the openers of my lessons, also continued. And still every student in my classes knew that I was under investigation. In particular, Mark Ross and Charmaine Gurney in Year 10 had knowledge which only a teacher could have told them. Later it was clear that Karen Reid had frequently visited Dianne Gurney and told her of what was going on at the school.

Surprisingly, some of my Year 7 and 8 students openly talked to me about "Toben being chucked out by McCraw", and they ensured me they would stick by me. This was very moving - and throughout the four weeks of 'support group' activity, these two classes stuck by me.

On the second day of the activity, Tuesday 10 July, Ray had organised a curriculum day for all staff members. McCraw had decided that staff had to be initiated into the secret order of Process Writing. The services of a primary teaching husband-wife team, Mr & Mrs Sue O'Brien, of Brownhill Primary School, Ballaarat, had been arranged for this morning.

As Sue and her husband took us through the mysteries I relaxed and smiled to myself. There was nothing that I didn't know about this mystery. I had some time ago initiated all my classes into it. After the session I invited Sue to my English room.

"That's wonderful work!" she exclaimed. "That's a good example of process writing."

I was pleased with such a response but I felt the pain of rejection, the pain inflicted upon me by McCraw. Ray simply did not want me at the school. It had nothing to do with my competence as an English teacher. I wondered whether Ray agreed with what the former emperor of Ethiopia was supposed to have said:

'Thinking is a painful inconvenience, a troubling deformity.'

Two days later, Ballarat subject adviser, Dennis Bolster, rang me at lunch time. He was sorry that he could not come to Goroke to visit me although he hoped that he could perhaps come the following week.

"But there may not be any need for my presence at the school by then," he added. Bolster didn't spell it out but he was, of course, referring to the 'support group' activity.

* * *

Our first de-briefing session was held after lunch in the principal's office.

"Now, Fredrick, I've asked Karen to be the chairwoman," Ray began.

"Well, I'd like to have these sheets of paper explained," Karen responded to my handing her sheets of paper.

"Right," I began, determined to make my point. "When the minutes of the last meeting were typed out, I noticed some things had been left off - some things had to be added to the written record. This is my addition to the minutes. I asked for a written response to my letter of 27 June which I believe is relevant to the formation of a support group. This is the first one."

"Can I have a copy of the letter?" Karen asked.

"Certainly," I replied, handing her a copy.

A long pause ensued as embers of the 'support group' organised themselves around this new material, which I felt was important enough to warrant inclusion into their report.

"I don't want to spend a long time debating this," Ray broke the silence in a whisper. "You expressed a concern in paragraph one and you're using this to then go on to make another statement."

"Relevant statements," I added, "which were made at the meeting but not recorded by you. I asked you why you had not responded to my letter and you replied that you wouldn't either."

“O.K., fine, and you just wanted that included?” asked Ray.

“That’s all. It’s an omission from the minutes, that’s all. If I’m to sign the minutes as being an accurate record of what happened, then I must make sure that it is, indeed, an accurate record.”

“You don’t have to sign them if you don’t want to,” Ray said indifferently.

“Paragraph 3 - what do you mean by that?” asked Karen.

“This is my comment regarding the enquiry - ‘I’ll look forward to an enquiry’. What I did say was that I have nothing to hide and therefore if the support group is unsuccessful, then I’m prepared to expose myself to an official enquiry. This is what’s expressed here in the spirit of open communications.”

“Are you saying that you’re not going to …” Ray began, then paused. “O.K.,” he continued, “I’m not going to debate that with you. I don’t think it’s applicable here.”

A long pause followed as members waded through the additions.

“I’m elaborating on my perceived omissions,” I said, “and in the spirit of open communications, I would welcome an enquiry, the point made in paragraph one.”

“Well, I’m not going to debate this, Fredrick. My record of what you said, and the notes I took at the time were quite clear that what was written in the paragraph is what was said.” Ray’s voice was strained and high-pitched. “The thrust of what you said wasn’t what you say now.”

“Oh, yes,” I replied firmly. “I said...” but Ray interjected.

“You said that ...oh, I’m sorry, now that’s ...”

In a highly agitated voice Karen Reid now interjected. “Can I just say something, can I please make a comment here? I think this is mulling over the past here.”

“I think so,” Ray’s voice faded in, and as I was about to respond Karen continued: “Please let me finish. I wasn’t involved in that meeting or anything like that. I was asked to be here on the support group and I saw that as a responsibility to you and to the school and that’s why I felt I was willing to become involved and in fact I’m getting a little bit upset now because I feel like I’m being put on the spot, on the defensive before it even starts. I became involved because I felt I could help someone.” Her voice thinned and began to sound child-like.

“Ray gave me permission to make these additions. I asked him beforehand and he asked me to do it in writing and make enough photocopies,” I added. “That’s what I’ve done, that’s all.”

“Well, that’s good,” Karen said. “These two sheets of paper come together as the true record of what was said at the meeting?”

“Right,” I said.

“Well, I’m not going to sign that that’s a true record of the meeting,” Ray said, annoyed by Karen’s acceptance of the sheets.

“And I wasn’t going to sign the other minutes that you wrote up because it was an incomplete record of what was discussed at that meeting. These omissions slanted the whole account against me. It was simply a biased report,” I said emphatically.

“That’s fine, Fredrick,” he said softly. “I won’t ask you to sign them.’

“Now, there are the other sheets you handed out,” Karen continued. “That was the meeting of you, Ray and Robert. Do we have copies of that meeting?”

“Yes,” I responded, “and there I have to add again for the sake of balanced reporting.”

Karen suddenly rose from her chair and dashed into the staffroom. She had left her own copies lying about in the staffroom. I wondered whether she had left them there for someone else to read.

“Now,” Ray began impatiently, “ ‘additions to paragraph two’.”

“Which additions?” Karen asked.

“These are the additions, on the sheets - because more information had to be added. It had the same fault,” I stressed, “as the other written record.”

“What do you know, according to this,” Karen continued, “ ‘The support group with Fredrick...what was on them then stated that the children would be aware of people coming in. This would polarise them and may affect their behaviour.’ Is this what you mean?”

“Yes,” I replied. “And my addition is ‘because of the Catch-22 situation of last year with Ray’. Then the second point,” but Ray quickly interrupted.

“Hang on, hang on. What you’ve written doesn’t convey that.” Ray sounded angry, his usual trick to bluff people into silence. “What you’ve written, Fredrick, is that you didn’t wish to elaborate further on how the behaviour would be affected because of the Catch-22 situation.”

“That’s what I stated and this has not been written in the notes,” I added. “It hasn’t been recorded and I believe that this remark of mine must be put in the written record. That’s what I said during the meeting.”

“Well, if you see that as important, Fredrick, fair enough,” Karen said carelessly. “But I don’t consider it important. Perhaps I wouldn’t even remember it.”

“Could you explain to me why you consider it important?” Ray asked, his voice showing strain.

“Because, as I said before, the attitude expressed by you at that time was that if the students behave and there is meaningful learning going on, it may well be because you are in the room and not because of my performance. If the behaviour is bad, then that would be because of my poor performance. So either way, your presence in the class room would not give me any credit for good teaching. It’s the heads-I-lose, tail-you-win nonsense. Did you ever think that the children could be playing up with you in the classroom because they have no respect for you?”

“I don’t think that’s relevant here, and I don’t accept that I said it like that at the last meeting ... eh..” Ray faded into silence.

“No,” I repeated, “I said that I don’t want to elaborate any further on how the visit could affect the students.”

Karen came to the rescue. “It looks to me like this problem shouldn’t arise this time because you’re taping the meeting. It reminds me of secretarial nit-picking.”

“But very important nit-picking”, I responded. “I’m fighting for my professional integrity.”

“No, please, Fredrick,” Karen pleaded, close to tears. “I feel that I shouldn’t be here. There’s no point. We’re not doing anything, having anything to do with the support group, getting into a debate whether a phrase should be added or whether it shouldn’t be added or whether it’s an accurate representation of something, and I’m finding it a little bit disturbing.”

I pressed on. “This is a written record and it will be important. Anyway, it goes on. If I may just put this one point - ‘Fredrick equates class control to silence’. I didn’t equate it to that. I made the point - ‘I question whether class control could be equated to silence in the room and whether this would influence the assessment of a meaningful learning situation’. Then I asked the question, ‘How do you assess/judge when learning is taking place?’ You can see that this is therefore an incomplete statement and I beg you to take it seriously. I am treating this support group in good faith and I believe that I should be permitted to put this in because this is what I said. That’s all. I just feel that I said all those things which did not appear in the written summary.”

A long silence was broken by Karen. “I would rather have had that discussion at the end of our meeting, after we, as a support group, had discussed what we had done. As a support group we should not be in a position where we are on the defensive before we start. It makes me feel that any help that I’m going to be offering is not going to be taken in the spirit in which it’s given and I find it a little bit disturbing. Do you understand how I’m feeling?”

“That’s your feeling. You’ve expressed your feelings,” I said.

“That is my feeling,” Karen continued, “and the conflict that arises is the feeling I have. It makes me feel that the effort I’ve put into this week has been wasted.”

“Why, Karen?” I asked.

“Because already there seems to have been some assessment made on it, as if already there have been judgements passed - that the recording is not accurate. If you felt that these … I feel that in the way I’ve worked this week, what happened at that meeting had no effect on the way I behaved at all this week.”
“I don’t know what you’re getting at, Karen,” I said. “The point is that ...”

Karen interrupted. “The point is that we came here to meet as a support group and that I would like to have had the help, the positive things or whatever, over before …”

“You call these things negative, Karen?” I asked.

“I’m saying before we launch into a discussion on what …” she paused. “It’s just one person’s record and summary which another person felt is not completely accurate.”

“I never stressed inaccurate,” I stated emphatically. “I merely said incomplete. I just wanted an addition - in the spirit of openness.”

“I’m not knocking the spirit of openness. But couldn’t they have been simply added in?” she asked.

“That’s all I intended to do, hand them to the support group.”

“That’s not the way it feels,” Karen sighed with relief.

Bruce Heggie, suddenly aroused from hibernation, offered a brilliant thought. “Let’s just accept what’s been handed in and get on with the task.”

“Can I say something?” Ray interjected in a quivering voice. “I really don’t feel that what I write is going to be accepted.”

“It’s accepted,” I offered as a response, “but there’s an addition, important points. We cannot reach sound decisions if we are deprived of important information. If we are to assess someone’s performance, then we have to be prepared to have our mind evaluated as well.”

“Would you chair the meeting, Karen?” Ray asked in a wounded tone.

“No, Ray,” she replied. “I feel the same.”

“Don’t you feel that my expressed concern is legitimate? You are here to judge me. Why are you now protesting, thereby blaming me for your hurt feelings? Now I’m the bad one again. This is exactly what Ray has already stated in his formal complaint, that I upset people. Am I not allowed to defend myself?”

“I’m not saying anything like that,” pleaded Karen. “But it seems to me that you’re expressing concern about what we’ve hardly begun.”

“We are in the process of something and I believe that these additions are important. And what’s wrong with that?” I asked firmly, having recovered somewhat from Karen’s attempt at emotional blackmail. “Surely this is a learning exercise for all concerned, and surely there is no room for sloppy sentimentalism. You are here to judge my performance and I am here to defend myself from the allegations that Ray has put in writing. I am treating this matter quite seriously, so much so that I would like to bring my representative into the group.”

“Who would you like to bring in?” Ray asked mutely.

“No,” I said, “I would like to know whether you would agree to my bringing in someone.”

Ray responded, “If it’s in line with the procedures it would have to be a member of staff.”

“It is,” I replied.

“Yes, you may,” Ray pronounced. “You don’t have to ask for permission.”

“Well, it’s Glenn Duncan.”

Suddenly the meeting livened up.

“I have one reservation about that,” Karen snapped. “Now that the initiation process has begun, he’s missed out on a bit.”

“But we’ve had other meetings,” I said, “where someone’s been absent. Even now Robert’s not with us.”

Bruce again stirred. “If the role of this group is a support group to try and look at what you’re doing and if possible, if necessary, offer advice, or help because there seems to be a problem, well, I’d just like to make the comment that bringing in a member of staff who is in his second year of teaching, who himself, by his own admission, has had some classroom problems, and ...”

I interrupted, “And still has. Let’s have a little honesty, please. We all have classroom problems.”

Without responding to my comments, Bruce continued “Is he in a position to offer advice as a support group member to your teaching strategies?”

“Yes,” I replied. “I think all teachers could, even in their first year, if they have been exposed to a classroom situation. Glenn was in my room two days ago and he was very perceptive. At the same time he is learning something by coming into English, how language is taught. Any teacher coming into another teacher’s class will learn something new. I’m involved with the kids - this is why outsiders can see things that I may miss. So, Bruce and Karen, I would not question Glenn’s competence. He is scrupulously honest and he has had industrial experience which is very important, I believe. He is a very perceptive thinker, and he analyses situations quite clearly. That is about all I would like to say in support of his coming into the group as my representative. I didn’t want to bring anyone in because it polarises the situation further. Any defence I may be presenting will automatically be critically evaluated as an attack, as we witnessed just before. But now I can see that it will be better to have someone watching the work.”

“O.K.,” Ray snapped, “let’s make a start. Who’d like to report on this week’s observations?”

Karen began. “I’d like to offer Fredrick our summary. From our visits we had a unanimous decision that the level of work which you’re giving your students is quite appropriate. I was pleased to see to what degree you were extending the Year 9 and 10 students. That was one positive aspect of your work. The only problems that we noticed in the class this week were very small. Sometimes when you start to explain things, you might only be explaining it to one or two. When a question of interest comes up, it might be a good idea to stop the class and tell them all. Then check that it has been understood - get someone to paraphrase it.”

“The final point we’d like to make,” Karen continued, “is on children answering back. Find out what the child has to say, evaluate its comment but don’t let it get away with nonsense.”

Karen looked relieved and pleased. “I certainly have no problem in accepting your advice,” I said.

"Anything anyone would like to add?" Ray asked, and silence followed. "Then can I read what's written here? There was a request made for taping - and it was agreed to; variations of minutes given and discussed; Karen's summary of her feelings. Does that sentence cover what you were saying about your feelings?" Karen smiled her agreement. "Fredrick wishes to reconsider his position and now wishes to bring in a member of staff; Karen explained to Fredrick the gist of support group meeting of Friday morning and explained in more detail some of the points listed; Fredrick accepted the comments made. O.K. Thank you," Ray looked at Bruce and Karen but avoided my eyes.

And as I walked out the principal's office, I recalled how the Regional Director, Dr Ken Boston, had urgently advised me to have a staff member on the support group. Perhaps it was foolish to think that bringing in anyone else on my behalf would further divide staff. I wasn't certain of anything any more. The first week's activity of the 'support group' seemed reasonable.

* * *

Throughout the following week I again hosted 'support group' members in the classroom, and again we met on the Friday in the principal's office. I was about to set up the tape recorder when other members of the group arrived. We were waiting for Robert Ferlazzo, the maths teacher. He was still rummaging in the school office when I started the tape recorder.

"Fredrick, we have decided that because it was not a unanimous decision that the meetings be taped, we would rather not have them taped," Ray said firmly.

"A unanimous decision?" I asked.

"No," Ray snapped, "it wasn't unanimous that it be taped."

"But you want a unanimous decision on this matter?" I asked.

"No, no," Ray blustered. "If it was going to be tape recorded, it would have to be a unanimous decision."

"That's what I just said," I replied, amazed at the logic of it all.

"Right," Ray muttered faintly.

"I see," I continued. "So all the support group decisions will have to be unanimous?"

"No," Ray said emphatically. "Not at all."

Then Robert joined the group. "Can I request that the tape recorder be turned off before we go any further?"

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I don't think it is necessary to tape these meetings. Tapes can be distorted." Robert looked distinctly uncomfortable, as if he himself didn't believe in what he had just said. He gazed helplessly at Ray, then glared at me through his thick glasses.

“It is extremely important for me to have these meetings taped. This is how I guard myself against incomplete, biased reporting,” I added, knowing the odds were stacked against me.

“I think we have all agreed that the meetings will not be taped,” Ray said with relief, and feigned cheerfulness.

And so I reluctantly switched off the tape recorder and the matter of open communications, as presented to staff by the American expert, Dr Wayne Flynn, became a closed book. It died when Robert Ferlazzo, the principal’s right-hand man, feared to expose himself on tape. Why would anyone fear being taped unless there was an element of dishonesty and deception in his intentions?
Thus my looking after my own self interests, defending myself, became offensive to those who so desperately wished to help me. What a situation to be in!

* * *

Three more such sessions with my ‘support group’ came to pass, without the impartial and non-biased facilities of a tape recorder. The final de-briefing session was a charged affair. ‘Support group’ members sat around the principal’s desk, smiling and joking. But beneath all this joviality there was extreme nervousness.

“Fredrick,” Ray began in his deceptive velvety voice, smiling satanically, “we all agree that over this four-week period there has been no marked improvement in your teaching performance. This confirms my judgement of your competence. We’ve decided to discontinue the support group.”

“I see.”

“Are there any questions you would like to ask individual members of the support group?”

“Indeed, yes,” I replied. “I’d like to ask each one of you whether you are unanimous on this decision. Robert?”

“Yes,” he whispered.

“Karen?” I asked.

“Yes,” she responded in a deep voice.

“And you, Bruce?”

Clearing his throat he came out with a raspy “Yes”.

“Ray?”

“Yes,” he smiled.

“Glenn?”

“Yes,” he strained, “but not bad or sufficient for dismissal or transfer.”

"Well, thank you all for your help," I continued. "Ray, you've got your material now and with that your prediction has come to pass. I still question your honesty, your integrity, your motives. As you once said to me, you only take on things where you know you can win. Well, you've been at it for a long time. This is just like your vicious attack on Audrey, when you ridiculed her in the staffroom about her spelling policy statement. Those present also laughed, as you did. But you gauged their laughter as a barometer of Audrey's social standing. A clever calculation."

"Well, we can clear this up at once by calling Audrey."

Robert walked off to get her from the staffroom.

"Audrey," McCraw smiled ever so gently, "did I offend you when I laughed about your spelling policy statement?"

Audrey, a couple of years short of retirement, looked a little bewildered at the group facing her. "No," she said, "it was a bit of a joke."

"Thank you, Audrey," Ray said triumphantly, "that clears up this point. Thanks for coming in."

As Audrey left the room, McCraw continued, "This proves how Fredrick distorts the truth, how he misrepresents a situation to the extent that it becomes an untruth."

"Just wait and see," I added confidently. "Audrey's next in the firing line."

"I don't think there's any purpose in continuing this meeting any further," McCraw interjected. "I therefore close this meeting."

"Ray," I said, "let me just make some concluding remarks. You know that our conflict is a personality clash, a conflict of values, a conflict of what education is all about. I had hoped that the support group would clear up this conflict. Your aim, however, has always been to use this procedure as an administrative process to remove me from the school, thereby making your predictions come true. And all, except Glenn, you have just slipped into your first kill, possibly without knowing it. Your 'support' has become an execution. For that I thank you. You should thank me for having given you the opportunity of maturing at my expense."

As I walked out the room, I saw Robert throwing his books to the floor, exclaiming "Fuck it, that's not fair." He began to cry and Ray rushed over to him, hugged him, then together they ran into the sickbay just across from the office foyer.

* * *

About four months later Ray announced in the school newsletter that Audrey McLean would be placed on sports duty for 1985. This caused quite a controversy among the school community because Audrey was a small, corpulent lady who was about to retire from the teaching service. School Council President Edwin Mitchell called upon MP Eddie Hann, who in turn directed Mitchell to Jim Betson. He, in turn, blasted McCraw for having made such a callous appointment. The point was taken by Audrey, when she went on a year's sick leave in 1985. The following year she retired form the teaching profession.

* * *

And so, on Friday, 3 August 1984 - almost a year to the day since Ray had withdrawn his permanency recommendations - I had been rejected by a majority of the 'support group' members. They had considered my defence as proof of my antagonistic and challenging attitude towards them. More starkly expressed, my physical presence at the school was an offence to them, proof of my incompetence in the classroom.

The fact that my classes began to settle down markedly after the four-week public exposure was not noted by anyone. Only the hard core of three students continued the push against me. The others enjoyed staging plays such as 'Toad of Toad Hall'. Even Brad Stacey excelled in his performance with John Mulraney on their scripted play 'The Perfect Match'. The secondary school watched a performance of this play three days before the end of Term II. All secondary teachers attended, including 'support group' member Robert Ferlazzo who brought along his Year 10 students.

My Year 10 also presented a successful debate on whether the Olympic Games officials should have stopped the long-distance walker from competing, before she wobbled, half-collapsing in the stadium.

During the final school week I also made use of the video recorder, screening 'Watership Down', 'Wind in the Willows', and 'Picnic at Hanging Rock'. Student response was, as usual, mixed. The more perceptive could clearly differentiate between a visual and a written presentation of a story.

All this good, productive work counted for nothing. Six days later, on Thursday afternoon, 9 August, just before home-time, Ray approached me in the school corridor. He walked purposefully towards me, his face literally glowing.

'This is the written copy of the Support Group Report and a copy of my Formal Statement of Complaint." He handed me the copies and I noticed that his hands were shaking. "And please sign this receipt. And," he added as an afterthought, "you've got five days in which to reply to this report."

"Thank you, Ray," I said as I signed the sheet of paper. "Have a nice day."

Once home, I browsed through the 80-page report. I mused to myself when I read the charge of incompetence. Then I gasped when I came across a hand-written sheet. It was written by Mark Weegberg, who had not been on the 'support group', and in detailed how I had sent Year 7 student Sharon Lyall out of the room because she had refused to do her spelling work. In his large scrawl Mark detailed what had happened:

"1/8/84
Sharon Lyall was sent out of English during period 5 and as Ray could not be found was sent to me. She was in tears and took quite a few minutes to calm down enough to speak to me.
She said she had been sent out because she refused to work and added that she did not want to go back. She claimed that she had done this because she was 'always' made to sit on her own.
She felt that others in the class did not receive the same treatment as she did. She felt that when others were made to sit on their own, they had the chance to be able to end the punishment.
She felt that even though she worked when on her own she had no chance to be allowed to sit with the others.
Quite clearly she feels that she is being punished indefinitely and can do nothing to end the punishment.
She only returned to class after I said I would try and fix the situation.

Mark Weegberg.

* John Nunn had not yet entered the room."

I smiled to myself as I noticed the comment next to the asterisk. John Nunn, the gentle Senior Education Officer, had actually been in my classroom, sitting at my desk and witnessing the whole episode - when a student refused to participate in my daily ten-word spelling test, for which I had designed a special booklet. Sharon Lyall refused to open her booklet, and I didn't want her to miss out on this exercise, the daily exercise which gave all my students 50 spelling words a week!

I was puzzled. Why would this non-member of the 'support group' be adding material to the report? I certainly had no knowledge of his written statement before this time. So, what was the purpose of this Weegberg contribution? The answer seemed so obvious and, at the same time, unbelievable. The 'support group' was in the act of collecting evidence against me, not for me, not helping me in any way.

I now began to check the hand-written notes made of this incident on pages XIXA, i and ii, dated a.m. 3/8/84.

"General Obs.
Sharon Lyall. - sent out on Wed. - to M.W. then to Bruce.
- S. Lyall - walked in want to sit with girls - told to shift - why - just shift she did - "get books out" - "No - won't care if fail' Sent out.
- Sharon admits she talks etc. but when she wants to do the right thing she is still punished
Bruce feeling - F removed her early because John Nunn coming."

Karen Reid, in her reported observations on the Year 8 class, added the following:

"Wed - John Nunn here. Sharon Lyall removed before J N entered - within 5 min."

I asked myself why members of the support group would comment on an incident which they had not personally observed. It was a mixing of fact and fiction, in which the concept of truth became irrelevant.

The logic of McCraw's comments didn't puzzle me anymore. He was out to salvage his reputation by any means. Often he had written "not true" or simply "crap" in the margins of his copy of my Reply to his Formal Statement of Complaint.

Somehow I just felt dispirited because of the Lyall incident. Their report had not been an honest one. Only Glenn was supportive, especially during the week of my writing up the reply. Five days is not enough for such a task, especially if one is not offered emergency teachers. On the last day I set my class a video and asked Glenn to supervise them. McCraw rushed into the 'small office' where I was typing out my reply.

"Shouldn't you be in class now?" he shouted breathlessly.

"I've got Glenn supervising my class. They're only watching a video," I replied.

"You're here to teach and not to complete private, personal matters during school time. I order you back into the classroom," he snapped. "You're neglecting your teaching duties."

"And you had an emergency teacher covering the group while the report was being typed up. Another example of your double standards, Ray?" I jested as I packed up my things and returned to supervise the screening of 'Wind in the Willows'.

* * *

Somehow I managed to put together an extensive 50-page reply to both reports. My wife handed in the reply on the second last day of Term II, the day on which I drove to Ballarat.

When Mark Weegberg saw her place the report on the staffroom table, he gasped: "Gee, that's a lot!"

I would have liked personally to hand in the reply but the Ballarat trip was crucial, so I thought. The week before John Nunn had advised me to visit a number of Ballarat secondary schools. Subject adviser Dennis Bolster also confirmed this, though adding a strange disclaimer.

"I'm not supposed to do this. Boston's told me not to. So, just ring up the English co-ordinaters at the schools and make an appointment with them. They know you're coming."

And this is what I did. At Sepastopol Technical School I spoke to Nicole Charleson; at Ballaarat High School, Debbie Marshall; and at Wendouree High-Tech, Paul Hoban.

The three-hour trip to Ballaarat was uneventful and I arrived on time at Sebastopol. One hour in the classroom gave me the assurance I needed. I knew then what I had known before, from my own past experience of teaching, that I was a good teacher - not perfect but certainly not incompetent. Individual teachers cannot be blamed for low school-student morale. It's a principal who raises or lowers school morale. Unfortunately the school system as such is in trouble, not only in the state system of Victoria but in all Australian states, and in the western world generally. Singling me out as having caused such a state of affairs at Goroke gives me too much power, too much importance - naturally negative importance.

I had a couple of hours before my next school visit and decided to see Dennis Bolster and Ken Boston. Ken let me wait for half an hour before he received me, to only lecture me. "You refused the help offered you by the support group. The problem we're now facing is that you cannot be given a reprimand because you haven't done anything wrong."

"What do you mean, Ken," I protested, "I didn't accept the help offered to me? I did accept reasonable advice. But the whole exercise was a dishonest process. I accepted their common-sense advice - which I could have just as well have given to them when students misbehaved in their classes."

Ken didn't respond but merely continued "I don't want you to visit the other schools. You should have visited them during your support group activity," he added sternly.

"How could I, Ken?" I protested. "Take time off during those four weeks? We had enough days off as it was."

He looked rather uncomfortable and after a long silent pause he asked "What about a transfer from the school? Would you accept an offer?"

"Only if it is given to me in writing. The gossip mill, fuelled by John Bell, already has me out of town by tomorrow because I'll be sacked from the Department."

"I can't give you anything in writing,' he said, annoyed by my request.

"Why not?" I probed, but there was silence.

"Matters will now take their course. It will all be resolved very quickly now," he added as an aside, and he rose from his chair indicating that my time was up.

On my way out of Ken's office I saw Dennis Bolster slinking about the corridor. "We all feel sorry for you but there's just nothing we can do," he spoke softly, with sad eyes protruding from behind the bearded mask.

"Why is Ken blocking my going to the schools, Dennis?" I asked. "I've made appointments to visit there."

"I'm not allowed to comment on anything now, Fredrick. I hope you understand. When I started teaching, I had a similar experience, except that my friend was dismissed and I just hung in there by the skin of my teeth."

"Well, Dennis," I said, "you've done well. What can I do now?"

As I expected, Dennis didn't respond. His sad, bearded face, his passivity in just standing there outside of Ken's closed office door - what could he say to me?

It was time for me to return home and tell my wife the bad news that my Ballaarat trip had been a waste of petrol and energy. Tomorrow would be the end of Term II and I looked forward to spending two weeks at home with my family.

On the last school day I found a copy of the 'support group' report lying in the double room. It was placed on top of a table, together with some other papers clearly belonging to Robert Ferlazzo.

Year 10 students had already browsed through the material because during period 4 one girl, Sharmaine Gurney, quoted liberally from it.

"You're incompetent," she sniggered at me. "It's now been proven."

Robert also showed himself to be quite a just and balanced person. After the 1985 Easter weekend Centenary of Education celebrations, which the principal and his group had boycotted - and to which I made a substantial contribution - a group attended a dinner at The Plover Inn, the farmhouse-turned-restaurant. The Centenary of Education committee also spent an evening there. To our surprise we found a strange entry in the restaurant's guest book, made by Ferlazzo:

'Teacher dismissal country and school council president's deposed at leisure.'

Robert was, indeed, a clever boy. To anyone who had to attend meetings, he would distribute a sheet listing 50 suggestion stoppers. He was proud of having found this material. He even pinned it to the staff notice board.

As an item of information it seemed fair enough. But he used any of these 50 points in his personal power game at staff meetings. What had this to do with open communications, with establishing the truth of a matter, or balancing our moral, social and legal duties towards others? When I mentioned this to him, he told me to 'piss off', which I did! Here is Robert's list:

1. There is no-one capable of doing the job.
2. We've never done it that way.
3. It won't work.
4. We've tried that before.
5. It's not in the budget.
6. We're not allowed to do that.
7. Too expensive.
8. Not ready for it yet.
9. Good idea, but on the machine it's different.
10. That's the theory but can it work in practice?
11. Too academic.
12. The boss won't allow it.
13. Too hard to administer.
14. Too much paperwork.
15. Too early.
16. Too late.
17. It's not good enough.
18. There are better ways than that.
19. The customers won't like it.
20. Management won't like it.
21. I don't like it.
22. The union won't like it.
23. It's against a pay policy.
24. You haven't considered ....
25. Somebody would have suggested it before if it were any good.
26. Let's not step on their toes.
27. Too modern.
28. Too old-fashioned.
29. Let's discuss it at some other time.
30. You don't understand our problem.
31. Why start anything now?
32. We're too big for that.
33. We're too small for that
34. The new men won't understand.
35. The old men won't use it.
36. We have too many projects now.
37. Let's make a market research test first.
38. Has anyone else ever tried it?
39. What you are really saying is ....
40. It has been the same for 20 years so it must be good.
41. Let me add to that.
42. What idiot thought that up?
43. I just know it won't work.
44. Let's form a committee.
45. Let's be practical.
46. It needs more study.
47. Let's think it over for a while and watch developments.
48. That's not our problem.
49. Let's shelve it for the time being.
50. We can't do everything at once.

TWENTY FOUR - TRANSFER OR ENQUIRY

The 'support' group completed its work on Friday afternoon, 3 August. On Tuesday evening, 7 August, even before the group had written up its report, the principal reported to School council:

"Dr Toben - explained the situation; outlined the ways in which his performance was unsatisfactory in the classroom and the subsequent action; report from Support Group now on to Director of Personnel, in the Department; official enquiry or transfer may result, as the Director decides;

- report has moved from school control to department control.
- students are still receiving English, and their education will not be put in jeopardy.

Some degree of concern was expressed by the Council at the effect that the investigation and upheavals may have on students."

Bearing in mind that the two student representatives, Year 10 Mark Ross and Year 9 Brad Stacey, were both talkers, such supposedly confidential Council airing of my matter added to the gossip mill.

More to the point, why was the principal in such a hurry to advertise the 'support group' activity to School Council? I had still not written my reply to the report, nor had I been given a copy of the report. Such indecent haste needed some explaining. The principal had again made predictions - a transfer or an enquiry would follow the report. And further, students were still receiving English - from an incompetent English teacher! Perhaps the crisis at Goroke was merely a crisis in the principal's mind!

* * *

Geoffrey French, the art teacher who had been sent to Goroke to teach science, left at the end of Term II. The school bulletin simply announced that he had been transferred to Apollo Bay. Those in the know knew why he had left Goroke.

After my 'support group' activity ended, Ray was very keen to begin another one. He had already organised Mark Weegberg to head the new team, especially designed to help Geoff French with his massive teaching problems'. The support was to begin at the commencement of Term III.

Unfortunately Geoff didn't take kindly to Ray's intentions. He knew how I had been treated. During the holidays he contacted Staffing and asked to be saved from this humiliation. Staffing agreed that the principal was now going overboard. A second 'support group' for a teacher at a school with 50 secondary students and a secondary staff of 11. It seemed absurd and perhaps indicative of the principal's incompetence.

Three years later Geoffrey French put pen to paper and wrote about his Goroke experience. In a letter to the local *Wimmera Mail-Times* he had this to say:

Friday, 24 July 1987

"Sir, - In response to your article on Dr Fredrick Toben, I would like to express my personal views relating to the victimisation of Dr Toben at Goroke Consolidated School.

In June 1984 I was offered a position at Goroke Consolidated School teaching maths and science. I am a qualified art teacher, but I accepted the position as I was anxious to begin my teaching career, and I was assured of a position in my own teaching area at the beginning of 1985.

I was prepared to do my best as I realised that there was a dire need for maths-science teachers in the state.

Shortly after arriving in Goroke I became aware of unrest among the staff, and that different staff members were trying to draw me into the conflicts within the school. I had no wish to be part of the situation as I needed all my time and energy to

devote to the particular problems related to teaching out of my area, yet I could not avoid at least listening to both sides of the arguments and issues presented by different staff members.
I got the impression that Fredrick Toben, an English teacher at the school, was being treated unjustly and with little respect. I found him intelligent, friendly and interesting to talk to. His teaching and discipline methods were being questioned by some of the staff, which amazed me, as I thought that he was very capable and dedicated to his profession.
My office desk was right next to the room where Mr Toben taught his class and the walls being very thin, I could often hear what was going on in the room. It was obvious to me that Mr Toben's lessons were innovative and thoroughly planned, and I could not relate to the views suggested by other staff members.
I could only assume that these people were deliberately attempting to get rid of him for some particular personal reasons, as I could see the time and work he put, not only into his teaching, but also the school radio station which he set up with the students.
I did not wish to take sides in this situation at the school, but could not help but feel sympathy for Mr Toben as he was continually expected to 'prove' his abilities and cope with the pressures exerted upon him.
I was often advised by some staff members not to have anything to do with Mr Toben, which I rejected as I could see nothing wrong with him, rather I found him co-operative and helpful.
During term two I felt increasing pressure being exerted upon myself, as to my own teaching performance. Being a 'first-year out' teacher I naturally had a few problems with difficult students, but I did not feel they were significant.
Many of the other teachers had similar problems with the same students, yet I felt that they were implying that I should have 'perfect' discipline in my own classes.
The increasing pressure exerted upon me, combined with the frustration of teaching out of my area stared to take their toll.
I felt that I could not see the year out under the restriction put upon me, and that I would resign at the beginning of the next term.
During the September holidays I arranged an interview at Nauru House in Melbourne and explained the situation to one of the education officers. He agreed that I was being mistreated and offered me a position at Apollo Bay for term three, teaching woodwork, which I accepted as I still desired to teach.
During my stay at Apollo Bay I thoroughly enjoyed teaching and found the staff extremely co-operative and friendly. I was greatly relieved and able to gain some confidence in the education system.
During the last 2 1/2 years I have taught at Macleod High and Ballarat High and have greatly enjoyed these teaching positions. The principals and staff at these schools have been consistently supportive and helpful.
Looking back, I view my stay at Goroke very poorly. The school lacked a good discipline system, leaving everything to the individual teacher, which is unrealistic when there are students who seem to want nothing more that to prevent their peers from learning.
It was the only school I have been in where I have felt pressured and threatened in my attempts to perform at my best.
I believe that Fredrick Toben has done nothing wrong. Rather he is the type of teacher who is an example to the profession.
I still do not fully understand why he has been so badly mistreated and further, unjustly sacked from the Education Department.
I believe that Mr Toben should be reinstated to a teaching position at the Goroke Consolidated School.
Surely JUSTICE should be greater than 'saving-face'.
Geoffrey French, Art Teacher, Ballaarat High School."

* * *

My family and I welcomed the two-week school holidays. It gave me time to simply be at home with wife and son. Yet even there we were reminded of what had just happened at the school. My wife had been told by kindergarten assistant Glenda Crabtree that Karl would not be attending kinder during third term because Georgina was leaving the Health Centre on account of my being dismissed from the Department.

At kindergarten Karl was told by some littlies "Your dad is a bad man."

It was John Bell, the only teacher to gain the no-fuss permanency, who spread these rumours. He spread this through his then mistress, who in turn had told Glenda all about it.

"Why don't you see John Nunn again?" my wife urged.

"Will do, dear," I replied. "But I don't think he can do anything, except listen to my complaint and act as a confessor. Talking certainly lightens the burden but it will not take it away."

John's attitude to me had not changed over the past year. "Just do your best, Fred," he said.

"Did you know," I asked, "that Geoff French asked to be transferred out of Goroke because McCraw was going to put him on a support group?"

"No," he replied, " I didn't know that. Let me know how you're getting along next term. How are Karl and Georgina?" asked the well-seasoned bachelor.

"The stress is telling, John," I responded, "but we're coping. My wife still believes that I'm a competent teacher.'

"That's good," he said, sounding so sincere.

* * *

I used part of the holidays to check through my English department. It was up to scratch because there wasn't much to it. I prepared the sets of novels and plays for term three, and I also planned to enter the State-wide Spelling Championship competition which The Herald newspaper and RESI Building Society (now Bank of Melbourne) sponsored.

Goroke didn't participate in 1983 because Jane didn't have a spelling program for her Year 9 students. During September I ensured that all my students participated in the spelling championship. Student enthusiasm was very high, especially when their names appeared in the school bulletin. Anthony Sonego, Year 7, Stephanie Brook and Michelle Johnson, Year 8 and Deanne Blythman, Year 9, competed in the school championship. It was held on Friday 21 September, and won by Deanne. She received an Oxford dictionary and all classroom champions received a lovely certificate to mark their achievement. John McFarlane of *The Herald* (now part of the *Herald-Sun* newspaper) was sad to see Deanne not wishing to participate in the Regional Finals to be held at Ballaarat.

* * *

At the School Council meeting of 4 September, a day after we returned from our holidays, Ray made an important announcement. He informed Council on the progress of my matter, and it was written up in Council minutes thus:

"Dr Toben - no movement presently, Melbourne officials will eventually offer a transfer; an enquiry will follow a refusal of this; time - 5 weeks minimum."

As with his previous statements to School Council, Ray was making definite predictions, which naturally were eagerly absorbed by the two student representatives on Council - Mark Ross and Brad Stacey.

And Geoff French's disappearance from Goroke was also noted:

'Teacher transfer - Geoff French to Apollo Bay - his lessons have been covered.'

Ray had also informed staff and Council that on 11 October, John Nunn would hold an in-service on program budgeting, a day on which students would not be required to attend school - much to the annoyance of parents who were glad to see their kids gone for the day.* * *

The following week, on Monday 10 September, the Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations Mr Jim Betson instructed acting senior Welfare Officer, Mrs Irene Wescott, to evaluate the Support Group Report.

"This is a difficult case," he wrote in a memo to her. "We must analyse the report and extract every incident which would indicate either misconduct or incompetence. See what else we have on his file and add to this file. Check whether or not he could be replaced if we have to transfer him and also where there may be suitable vacancies. It seems to me that an enquiry may be necessary."

Mrs Wescott diligently worked through the report and made hand-written notes of the following allegations:

"1. No real attempt to keep noise level down but keeps talking over the top of noise without admonishing chn. 8/6/84 (Year 8 En.)

2. When situation develops into a confrontation sends chn. from room as only way of dealing. 6/7/84 - 12/7/84

3. Shouting matches with students (13/2/84, 22/2/84)
1983 /Duane Blythman lit paper fire in Metal Workroom.

4. Not in classroom when expected to be supervising students 26/3/84 (20 mins late) 7/12/83. Not there an extra.

5. Administrates discipline differently e.g. John Mulraney - very noisy. Michelle Sonego talked softly. Former was ignored; latter spoken to.

6. Does not supervise whole class but works with one child and ignores what is happening to rest. Mentioned 3 times 26/6/84. Or works at table on other correction (Year 9. 25/6 Year 8 . 8/6)

7. Does not relate to students in choice of literature (Year 10 16/7/84) Complaints from chn. in not understanding Year 9. 16/5/84 Yr 9. 25/6/84.

8. Makes hurtful and sarcastic comments. May 84 made fun of Brad Stacey. (notes and letter attached) 3/7/84 made fun of Brad Stacey at council. July 1984 comments about Michael Ross & family.

9. Does not gain respect of students. 'Cheeky' 8/6/84 Eng.

Support Group Notes

10. Marks children's work in inconsistent manner. Year 9 Eng. 13/7/84.
19/4/84. marking of copied work! 2 different marks (We might all be guilty of that)

Notes on Remedial Meeting
11. Examples of poor teaching techniques.

12. Does not co-operate with staff as in the example given on rough notes on pages between P9 and P10.

13. Denigrates staff members who wish to support Yr. 8 incident. Mrs Carter's name used with statement that Yr.-8 were a 'bad form'.

14. Denied shouting at student (Charmaine Gurney)

Summary - the list of examples continues in rough notes, but do they make an "inquiry"? The chief problem seems to be Dr Toben's inability to listen to advice, and to accept support.

Suggestion Transfer (?) to large school with support group set up. The school could replace with an emergency.

Please read summary of experience at earlier schools. He does not seem to accept that he is part of a team, and that a school is an organisation with set rules (times, expectations, etc.)

Irene W."

* * *

The great instrument for the moral good is the imagination, so I read somewhere. I was therefore all the more disturbed to hear the principal say at the 11 September staff meeting "Don't get sucked into an argument about values."

I did not lock horns with Ray on having made such a stupid remark. Good or bad student behaviour was thereby relegated to a witch-hunting exercise of finding and blaming a convenient scape-goat. In McCraw's usual double-standards approach it was sometimes a hapless socially weak student, but most times any trouble at school was allegedly caused by Toben's presence on the staff.

Fortunately for me, I was slowly recovering from last term's onslaught and I began to feel stronger again. My Spelling Championship indicated to most staff that I was again stimulating my English students.

On Monday, 17 September, most teachers were aware of the fact that I was handing out certificates to the class spelling champions, and that in three days time I would announce the school spelling champion.

I also set my Year 10 students an essay topic on 'Lord of the Flies': In what way is the novel a picture of our society? The topic was difficult and very general but some unexpected responses came from the silent students. It was Mark Ross and Charmaine Gurney who were extremely uneasy with the book Charmaine ridiculed Piggy for being 'weak and a sook'. I found this telling of her own personality, of her confused moral development. Yet I did not preach to her. After all, that was the beautiful function of good literature - it doesn't tell us about life but rather shows us life.

It was also on this Monday that McCraw received complaints from Mrs Gurney.

McCraw also immediately informed Irene Wescott of the happenings at school. She dutifully noted the report:

"Parents' Unrest - Need to act Please.
Dr Toben / Rang parents of Year 10 on Friday evening. Blamed students, teachers (& one instance the parents) for an incident on the Friday afternoon.
2 parents were at the school this morning; will withdraw students. School Council now. The Year 10 has only 7 students now.
Principal feels the affair is ready 'to blow out through the community. He has until to day confined it within the school'."
Jim Betson added his comments:
"Await advice from RED
Rang Irene Wescott (1) ask VSTA to look at file (2) I will consider transfer if requested, otherwise immediate enquiry."

What irony that McCraw was telling Staffing that the Friday incident could cause the affair to blow out through the community. He had conveniently not mentioned the fact that he had formally raised my matter with school council in August, and informally since August 1983.

Three days later, on Thursday, 20 September, Goroke Consolidated School had an Open Day. Many parents entered my English room. There was nothing but praise from them. No doubt the handful of

antagonistic parents certainly didn't come to see me. They would much rather listen to the interpretation of events from the principal, from gossip.

On my class board I had an interesting THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: 'Do you think not getting caught on a lie is the same thing as telling the truth?'

Around 4.30 p.m. that afternoon I received a telephone call from Russell Wicking. He identified himself as an assistant secretary of the Victorian Secondary Teachers' Association.

"They're making you an offer of a transfer. I'm offering you this transfer per Irene Wescott, who has been instructed to make this offer on behalf of Jim Betson."

"Well, Russell," I answered, "I certainly accept this offer in principle but I must have the offer in writing. Too much gossip has already spread about my imminent dismissal from the Department."

Russell became agitated. "A written offer would delay matters unnecessarily."

"But I must have something in writing because this would balance the gossip," I protested. "Benalla Tech staff is pushing against a principal. Here principal and staff are pushing against an individual teacher. I need protection, Russell."

"If you do not accept the offer," Russell said sternly, "Mr Betson may opt for an immediate enquiry."

"I must have the offer in writing, Russell," I responded. "I have already discussed the transfer with our Regional Director, Dr Ken Boston, and I have accepted his offer in principle."

"Dr Boston is in no position to offer you anything," he replied. "I'll ring Irene about it and get back to you a little later. And if you regard the transfer as a blemish against your character, "Russell continued, "then you have the opportunity of being assessed again in twelve months time, in an unbiased way at a larger school."

Russell didn't come back to me on this offer. Later I was to learn that Irene Wescott had been instructed by Betson:

(1) ask VSTA to look at file
(2) I will consider a transfer if requested, otherwise immediate enquiry.

She had transferred this into her own notes thus:

Contact VSTA re Dr Toben to come & have a look at file.

Mr Betson wishes to have an immediate enquiry, or else teacher to seek transfer.

Contact Russell Wicking. Done.

On Friday 21 September, the day after Russell Wicking had rung me, Irene Wescott reported to Jim Betson.

"I think this needs some discussion. I have been talking to R. Wicking re Dr Toben whom he rang last night. Dr Toben says 'I have been watching Benalla closely and will be asking for an inquiry'."

(The word 'asking' was underlined three times with a couple of exclamation marks) Wescott continued:

"Should I start the process?"

Beneath Wescott's signature Jim Betson added:

"Yes please institute an immediate inquiry <u>after</u> we have settled on the allegations. Please discuss. JBB 20/9/84."

The following Monday, 24 September, Jim Betson sent instructions to Irene Wescott:

"Please contact Dr Boston, Regional Director, and ask for his Assistant Regional Director to conduct an enquiry into this matter.
There will need to be a briefing session involving VSTA.
The biggest problem will be the preparation of allegations. I suggest that they should be developed by the enquiry officers. J B Betson."

That afternoon, around 2.10 p.m., Ray McCraw approached me in the staffroom, where I was still finishing my coffee. I had a free after lunch and I had just come in from the radio studio.

"I've just had word from Irene Wescott," he smiled at me. "Her message to you is that because you did not exercise your right of a transfer, there will now be an enquiry in two to three week's time. You didn't opt for a transfer, therefore you're getting your enquiry."

"Thank you, Ray," I responded. I did not have to ask him any questions on the matter. It was clear to me that the machine had begun its course. It followed McCraw's predictions - all except that my request to have the transfer offer in writing had been brushed aside.

Fred Rodgers, principal of Horsham Primary, then entered the staffroom. He had been at the school all morning, as a visitor.

On Friday, 28 September, around morning recess time, Russell Wicking rang me.

"Irene Wescott tells me she's proceeding with the enquiry. It's my job as your union representative on the panel to help you. Who would you like to have interviewed on you behalf?"

'I don't know, Russell," I replied. "If I get anyone involved in this matter, then I can be charged with having further polarised the staff, the community.'

"I'm sure things will work out. The last teacher I helped was exonerated by the enquiry."

"O.K. The only person I'd really like to see speaking on my behalf would be Geoffrey French."

"Who's he?" Russell asked.

"He was a teacher who was to have a support group put on him during this term, but he opted to transfer out rather than have McCraw destroy him."

"I'm not sure whether we can get him up for you. Apollo Bay is about 300 km from Goroke, isn't it?" he asked. "That would create transportation problems."

"Well," I said, "he's the only outsider I'd like to appear on my behalf. I'm shying away from involving the parents because that would also prove divisive."

"I'll see what I can do," and Russell ended the conversation.

On this day Irene Wescott, on behalf of Jim Betson, informed me in writing that:

'It is necessary to hold an official enquiry into allegations regarding your conduct at Goroke Consolidated School.
The enquiry will be conducted by Mr J. Clelland, A.R.D.E. (Central Highlands-Wimmera Region) and Mr R. Wicking, V.S.T.A. in accordance with the Three Union Agreement and will establish the facts pertaining to the allegations.
I have enclosed a complete set of written allegations. These allegations have also been provided to the members of the panel.
The enquiry is to be conducted at Goroke Consolidated School on Thursday, ELEVENTH October, 1984 commencing at 9.30 a.m.
the officers conducting the enquiry are to make sure that :-
(i) suitable accommodation will be made available;
(ii) appointments are made with those to be interviewed and a timetable established;
(ii) appropriate arrangements are made when it is deemed necessary to interview pupils;
(iv) appropriate questions are drawn up which are designed to establish the facts.
The full report of the officers conducting the enquiry shall be forwarded to me without delay."

This letter, together with the following letter from Jim Clelland, dated 5 October, was handed to me by the principal on that day:

'This is to advise you that the Education Department will conduct an enquiry into allegations against Dr Fredrick Toben, a teacher at Goroke Consolidated School.
The enquiry panel, comprising Mr Jim Clelland, Assistant Regional Director of Education, Central Highlands/Wimmera Region and Mr Russell Wicking of the V.S.T.A. will convene at Goroke Consolidated School on Thursday, October 11, 1984 at 9.30 a.m.
The enquiry is a fact-finding one rather than judgmental and will be conducted in an informal manner. The panel invites you to be interviewed during the hearing and you are advised that you may have with you a Representative. Guidelines as to the Representative's role at the hearing are attached for your information.
The approximate time of your interview will be: 9:50am & 2:30pm.
I look forward to seeing you on that day.
Yours sincerely,
Jim Clelland."

* * *

So, according to the written record, I had received "a complete set of written allegations" and "the enquiry is a fact-finding one rather than judgmental". Six years later the education bureaucrat overseeing my case tried to pass off the "complete set of written allegations" as being the hand written notes Irene Wescott had made on 10 September. The only difference between her hand written notes and the "complete set" consisted of the typed nature of the "complete set".

Also on this Friday, Ray called a special morning-recess staff meeting. "As you know," he began ever so smoothly, "John Nunn will hold the in-service on Program Budgeting next Thursday. Fredrick will also have his enquiry on that day." He paused noticeably, as if summoning up his energy. "And I'm also having a promotional assessment on Monday."

An absolute hush fell over the meeting.

"Next Monday," Ray continued, "you'll see a few strange faces about in your classrooms. I'd appreciate it if you tried hard to be nice to one another. Be a little more considerate and hold back your remarks and be more understanding towards one another."

The meeting continued to be hushed and no-one murmured or shuffled about. Staff had never heard McCraw speak like that before. Such a conciliatory tone, such plea for harmony moved everyone in the staffroom.

During the final lesson of the week, Year 7's Tony Wright remarked "This is the only class we've done any work in."

My Monday Year 10 English class was wonderful. The two stirrers had at last developed some restraint, some self-control. I had a stranger sitting at the back of my classroom, and I'm sure that he was impressed with my performance. He would also be impressed with the whole school. An air of refinement floated about in the staffroom, in the corridors, outside in the play areas. Weegberg's blustering had disappeared and Bell's animal noises had been silenced. Julie-Anne's, Karen's, Val's and Ray's hysterical twitters could not be heard. Goroke Consolidated School staff walked about with an air of sophistication, cultured sophistication - but only for one day.

It was back to boisterous and hysterical laughter on the Tuesday, and my Year 10 English stirrers became as obnoxious as usual, without restraint and seeking attention at all costs. I mentioned this to McCraw.

"The students are old enough to be responsible for their own behaviour. Even if they walk out of your class, just let them go."

I was stunned by such advice. Wasn't that exactly what we should not do - let the children decide what is good for them?

*

Thursday was a quiet day at school. Officially it was a student-free Curriculum Day. There was John Nunn in the school's double room, where I had held the successful Book Week Fair. John had spread out his material. He lacked authority and it showed. The day before, McCraw had made a snide remark about Nunn's powerlessness.

"He's only a Senior Education Officer. He's got no power now," Ray mumbled to Weegberg and Ferlazzo. "We got rid of the inspectors."

"About time, too," grumbled Weegberg. "Private schools don't have inspectors."

What Weegberg didn't want to hear was that private schools had to rely entirely on reputation. An honourable name gave a private school its standing. The government system had become unaccountable since the inspectorate was abolished and replaced by union ideology. Government schools became more student-centred and only those teachers survived who could manipulate their environment at the lowest common denominator, those who could dissemble perfectly to immature minds.

Program Budgeting was another one of those new things the Department pushed into its schools. What senior teachers had been doing for years suddenly became a fashionable exercise, something to be excited about. The prevailing ideology spoke against the money culture and yet here we were presented with some basics on how to spend your limited funds. Household keeping at school had been elevated into the mystic realm of Program Budgeting. Perhaps the financial rorts of past principals, at high and technical schools, and now at some of our TAFE colleges, had to be managed. What better way than to open the books to all staff?

John Nunn had just introduced us to an outline of his day's work when Julie-Ann Stehn, the school secretary, tip-toed into the room. Like those dreadful barristers who bow and scrape as they make their way to a judge's associate so, too, Julie-Ann looked pathetic in her cringeing self-importance. She whispered something into Ray's ear, then tip-toed out again. Ray smiled warmly at Robert Ferlazzo, then, without acknowledging John Nunn, walked out the room.

After about 20 minutes I was called out of the room by Ray's return. As I rose from my seat I heard the sports mistress, Peta Cummings, loudly call out across the room "Good luck, Fredrick". I felt the other colleagues freeze in their seats. How could Peta wish me good luck when they were wishing me a speedy execution? John quickly broke the ice by asking a question about money having been well spent during term one. Years later, after being seconded to the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Board (VCAB), Peta took flack from opponents of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE).

* * *

I had been invited to bring along to the enquiry my "representative", and I left the double room together with Glenn. As we entered the library, Jim Clelland was about to light another cigarette. He was a chain smoker, and at regular intervals he would brush his right hand across his forehead, then stroke his silver hair. Jim was worried about his hair. That was his only worry because he had come a long way in his teaching career, from primary teaching to Assistant Regional Director of Education. Now he would worry whenever he found his hair out of place.

Russell Wicking, the other gentleman, had also been a primary school teacher. He was the union man on the panel, representing the VSTA which he had joined because it promised him career advancement - it promised a greater power-play. He sat there looking bloated and anxious.

"Well, what's this all about?" Jim asked in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Ray lied to us about our permanency," I began. "He's been playing with us, learning his job at our expense. For ten months I've worked hard under extraordinary pressures - and I've overcome the hurdles placed in my way. How could I accept a transfer without having such an offer in writing? The rumour mill, the pub gossip had me dismissed from school as long ago as November 1983. We've come across gossip, the substance of which only the principal would know about. And it was spread by Bell, Weegberg and Ferlazzo - and the school secretary, Julie-Ann."

I was angry and close to tears. The whole business just didn't seem fair and honourable.

Clelland and Wicking looked distinctly uncomfortable. Glenn also told them of his personal problem with McCraw, how Ray had lied to him about his permanency, that it was an economic matter when in fact it was McCraw's doubt about Duncan's suitability as a teacher. Glenn also hotly disputed McCraw's assessment of our competence.

The panel of two noted everything but asked few questions. It was, indeed, an informal get-together at which Glenn and I aired our grievances. Clelland continued to chain smoke, taking just a few notes. Anxious-looking Wicking wrote throughout the meeting, never once asking us a question. Jim was the boss of that exercise. As the day progressed, all secondary teachers - except Peta Cummings - marched through the library door. 'Support group' members sat collectively before the panel. Clelland and Wicking formalised their information thus:

"As a group these teachers made the following statements.

a) that they had sincerely attempted to assist Toben.

b) that Toben would not accept advice or support - insisted always that he was right and that there was no member of staff sufficiently well qualified academically to offer him advice.

c) in general Toben's difficulties arise from shortcomings of personality.
d) that he treated all members of staff with extreme arrogance."

I was not given a right of reply to their statements and only a year later would know of what the 'support group' had said to the panel. This matter of refusing help, of rejecting their advice, of course, makes me out to be an unreasonable person. Hence the conclusion that I had 'shortcomings of personality'.
Oddly enough, I never felt that I couldn't tolerate anyone on the staff, or that I felt upset by what someone said to me. I would speak my mind on the nervous giggles, on silly union policies, comment liberally on the follies of feminism. But that would not throw me into moodiness, into periods of silence and despair. I'd battled my way from local primary to secondary school, then continued at tertiary level, and I had proven to myself that I could also collect a few degrees on the way. All of this included painful experiences of failure as well.
So, where does the charge of 'arrogance' come into it? I had great difficulty accepting such a charge. Who began rejecting me at school? Did I start the messy business? Who broke the trust on which normal relationships are based? Who lied to whom? The panel did not spell out that McCraw had lied to us. A disclaimer appeared at the beginning of the report:

"1. The fact that the Principal decided to withdraw his letter of support for Dr Toben's permanency application without telling Dr Toben of his decision, certainly caused a significant breakdown in relationships at the school. This no doubt aggravated the situation and clouded the real issues for the Panel members.
2. The panel views with concern the involvement of the school council in this matter and any decision made by the D.P.I.R. should emphasise that the involvement of the school council was in no way responsible for that decision.
3. The issue of support group needs to be emphasised as the first stage of assisting teachers at the school level, not as something that must be done first to bring about an enquiry."

McCraw did not simply not tell us about his decision to withdraw his support. He told us that there was a hold-up, that it was caused by the political and economic upheaval caused by a new Labor government. Saying such a thing is something completely different to telling us the truth of the matter, namely that he had decided to withdraw his support because we were not considered to be competent teachers. Both Glenn and I told the panel this vital piece of information, yet it was not recorded as such. This made the report inaccurate and a whitewash for the principal. The enquiry panel had not been honest in its work.

Similarly, the matter of school council involvement did not spell out the fact that the principal deliberately did this, so that he would generate an anti-Toben atmosphere. McCraw would be the last to be moved by a sense of duty to report what was going on at the school - unless there was a fast buck in it for him. The form of the fast buck was clothed in predictions made to School Council in August and September.

The third of their procedural comments also became revealing. I felt that I had no significant problems at the school. Nor did Geoffrey French. Yet McCraw had another 'support group' planned for him during third term. Was this why Russell Wicking did not help me in getting Geoffrey to Goroke for the enquiry? He could have highlighted a strange phenomenon - that of a second 'support group' operating at this small school. Would the panel of enquiry have read such an action in my favour, perhaps finding McCraw an incompetent principal? But perhaps such a judgement could not be made in this case. Is this why former Minister of Education, and President of the Legislative Council, The Honourable Alan Hunt, later informed me that I had encountered the proverbial establishment brick wall? I continued to look for help so that I could knock down this corrupt and rotten wall of the education establishment.

It was interesting to note how Glenn Duncan's role on the 'support group' was viewed by the panel.:

"Duncan was the only supporter that Toben had on the staff and it was fairly clear to the panel that they were united in adversity, as it were, each blaming the Principal for their failure to gain permanency (although that was no longer the case with Duncan)."

Indeed, McCraw had given all other teachers permanency. I was the odd one who failed because I was labelled an incompetent teacher. The panel did not comment on the underlying bonding which McCraw had achieved by rewarding teachers with permanency. Geoffrey French refused to follow McCraw's line of thought and suffered the consequences. Again, no wonder the panel didn't wish French to attend the enquiry.

The whole exercise of splitting staff and community into 'them' and 'us' was certainly achieved by this enquiry. I had tried to avoid this because it is simply foolish to oppose a principal in such primitive fashion. I aimed to have our personality conflict aired differently - by talking about and clarifying our educational aims, goals and objectives, by clarifying our educational values. This, of course, was exactly what McCraw had tried to avoid. It would have revealed a very threadbare cupboard wherein basic ethical ingredients were painfully missing. The enquiry panel also individually interviewed 'support group' members. They began with Bruce Heggie whom they considered to be

"a very impressive, calm down-to-earth, man, who had found Toben on several occasions to be guilty of blatant falsehood to gain his own ends or to absolve himself from blame".

Heggie had, of course, a reason to discredit me like that. The Brad Stacey incident of 5 June had something to do with it. Bruce had year 9 students working, unsupervised, with power tools cutting down an iron fence outside the front of the school. My wife had just come over from the Health Centre across the road, to visit me at school. I accompanied her back to the Health Centre. It was when we both passed the boys working on the fence that Brad Stacey called out to me "Bloody German bastard!" Upon my return from the Health Centre I stopped at the work site, put on my glasses and aped Brad. I did this instead of giving him a solid telling off. I had learned throughout my life that my German background would always prove for some a tempting target. However, it was best not to be defensive about it, as that was what anti-German people thrive on. Instead, I used humour to diffuse such attacks. (Once I began my English classes with a heavy German accent - and the students didn't like it at all. It stopped any teasing though!)

My teasing of Brad had serious consequences. Brad ran off to his teacher, Bruce Heggie, who was in the woodwork/metalwork room looking after the other half of his class. He bitterly complained to Bruce about my having teased him. Three days later, I was summoned to the principal's office where the group of boys - Brad Stacey, John Mulraney, Michael and Steven Ross - welcomed me with a big grin. And there was Bruce Heggie as well. McCraw began the hearing by asking the boys what had happened that had caused Brad to be so upset at my behaviour. All the boys denied that Brad had said anything at all that could be construed as rude or disrespectful. Bruce also expressed disbelief at Brad having misbehaved in front of my wife. I was openly criticised, and given a severe reprimand for unbecoming conduct toward students.

On Monday, 12 June, I made this an information item for our staff meeting. I also requested from McCraw that he give this reprimand to me in writing. My Book Fair plans for July and my visits to local Horsham radio stations with my radio committee at the end of June became my further information item. I had hoped that by raising this matter during the staff meeting I would counter any rumour mongering. I was wrong. The following morning, Ray called together a secondary staff meeting and again raised the issue, informing the staff that I had misrepresented the facts of the incident. From then on things settled down again. On Monday, 25 June, it was my turn to conduct the morning school assembly. I had prepared slips of paper on which I had printed the national anthem 'Advance Australia Fair', and this eliminated the excuse for students not singing at assembly time.

They had the words before their eyes, holding them in their hands. It was a good assembly and I could again feel envy and hatred coming from a certain quarter where it had been hoped that I could not do such a basic task. Perhaps that is why I wrote Ray a letter asking that my request of two weeks ago - to be given the reprimand in writing - be at last granted. That afternoon I received the following letter:

"Dear Fredrick
As you requested here is the written form of the verbal reprimand I gave you over the incident with Brad Stacey.
The action you took, in deliberately making fun of the fact that Brad wears glasses, and mimicking him and telling him this was how he acted - whilst making the jerky spasmodic actions (attributed to 'spastics' or mentally retarded people) was totally out of place. It is not the action that a teacher should take even to reprimand a student. The fact that you overheard a conversation between a group of students and assumed that a remark you heard whilst walking past was directed towards you, does not make your action appropriate.
Your stated aim 'to bring Brad down a peg or two and show him that he could hand it out but not take it' was achieved. The fact that Bradley has been misbehaving in class should be dealt with in class - not by 'putting him down' in this manner. As he said, you made him feel small and a 'dill' in front of his friends. I am concerned that you still think this type of activity is appropriate and as I said at our meeting I think you should consider carefully your methods of discipline. You say that other methods we have discussed do not work. If you wish to discuss this further I am willing to help you, to enable you to develop other strategies.
In closing I will state again that your action was, in my opinion, unprofessional and not the sort of behaviour that can be expected of teachers by the children in their care. It was revengeful and did not have nay positive outcomes, as it was not aimed at bringing about any positive outcome.
Yours faithfully,
Ray R. McCraw."

The fact that Brad was student representative on school council, the fact that he had been treating my English class with disdain, the fact that he was seriously illiterate, the fact that he told me didn't have to know how to write because he would make a lot of money, then get someone to do the writing for him - and the fact that at the beginning of the year he told me that now that he was on school council, he would get me sacked - all this made me decide to put my foot down in the only way that would make an impression upon him.
And now I had behaved quite unprofessionally, the words of insult - which in McCraw's words I had merely 'overheard' - became a non-issue. Students were listened to and what I had to say was irrelevant. That was the trend in this conflict right up to the Director General of Education, Dr Norman Curry. Where was the balance in this conflict? Heggie's lack of supervision of his group of students wielding power tools had gone under, had been forgotten, had become an irrelevant factor in this issue. I wondered why.

* * *

The enquiry panel then interviewed Robert Ferlazzo, and

"by this stage began to seek some positive evidence of the good side of Toben. Mr Ferlazzo stated that he could remember no instance of warmth or kindness in Toben's dealings with his colleagues. Stated that Toben leaves the building each afternoon promptly at 3:30pm (dismissal time). Arrives at about 8:40am each morning. Constantly keeps students in at recess and lunchtimes."

It is a pity that I was not given the opportunity to refute what Ferlazzo is purported to have told the panel. I could have pointed out that most of my recess and lunchtimes were spent in the radio room; I left the school building promptly to be outside for bus duty. My supervision of the Minimay bus meant that often I was still there when all the other buses had left the school ground. This was because the Minimay bus began at Minimay in the morning, arrived with students at the school, then turned into the Goroke-Horsham-Goroke passenger bus run. Ron Worsely, the bus driver at the time, knew well the pressure produced by the timetable which had the bus leave Horsham at 2pm and be ready for the bus run by 3:25pm. It was ironic to have Ferlazzo talking about warmth when he used to make misbehaving students put the waste bucket over their heads. He was, of course, also the author of the "Teacher dismissal country" entry in the local restaurant's guest book.

Karen Reid was next in line. She

"could give no instance of softness or warmth in Toben's relationships with staff … Miss Reid referred to Toben's verbal cruelty to children who are disadvantaged or handicapped. She said he seemed to go out of his way to embarrass them or in some way make their lives more difficult. It must be said that the panel saw Miss Reid as one of those teachers who tend to be over-sensitive about children's disadvantages or handicaps."

I certainly opposed the disadvantage philosophy - that only people with disadvantage be given the opportunity to advance. A Melbourne comedian overstated the issue by saying that if there was an afterlife he would like to return as a black, female, quadriplegic homosexual. Karen Reid had also stated to the panel that I had 'appeared to have befriended one student - Chris Worthy, a mentally isolated child.' I still cannot understand such a concept. How can a child be mentally isolated when that child is popular and well-integrated with his peers? Reid's comment revealed more about her own psychological problems.

Glenn Duncan's comments were of interest because the panel had got one fact wrong. It stated that

'Glenn Duncan, Toben's representative, is a young art/craft teacher. Toben is teaching him to play chess.' The panel's fixed mind set revealed itself because it was just the other way around: Duncan was teaching Toben chess!
'Duncan stated that McCraw had said to a Mr Stacey in the hotel that "he would like to have Toben sacked", and that Toben was the most inflexible person he has ever known.'

The absurdity of this comment, of course, rested on subsequent developments. When I cross-examined Duncan in the Family Court, by which time he had become my wife's de-facto husband, he was not very complimentary about my person. And for the County Court case, Duncan had a "memory lapse" which prevented him from recalling any details of our battle for permanency.

The funniest comment to the panel was made by Weegberg and Bell. They

'Gave further evidence that children who are normally very well-behaved become abusive and impertinent with Toben'.

These two school jesters, who had enough disciplinary problems themselves, dared speak about my discipline to a panel of enquiry. What a pity I was not present when they made their comments.

Similarly, Anna McCraw's remark, that

she had to state that she has witnessed many occasions when Toben has twisted facts to make McCraw appear in a bad light'.

Again, I would have preferred details to such sweeping generalisations.

And now to the parents who fronted up to the panel.

There was Mrs Carracher who told the panel '… that students have no respect for Toben. She said they found him inconsistent, difficult to understand and lacking in warmth'.

Mrs Ross, who was accompanied by Bruce Heggie's wife,
"… stressed that she and her husband were extremely dissatisfied with Toben as a teacher'.
Mrs Diane Gurney who
'… said that Charmaine (her daughter) arrived home later, extremely distressed that Toben had stood her up in front of class and told her that she need not bring her family problems into his classroom. Mrs Gurney also stated that she had sought an interview with the Principal and Toben to discuss Charmaine's problem. She said that Toben was extremely patronising to

her, deliberately using 'big words" so that she could not understand what he was talking about. The interview achieved nothing.'

And Mrs Stacey who told how her son, Brad, had taken
'… a note of explanation to school but Toben refused to read it'. Told Mrs Stacey later, publicly - "I don't accept excuses - ever!" The school secretary was also able to enlighten the panel, that Dr Toben complained consistently to a number of parents about their children's behaviour in school.

Ray McCraw had also told the panel, when it considered the matter of confidentiality - because Julie-Ann typed most of the letter -
'Mrs Stehn was the soul of discretion.'

There was also the Librarian, Val Bull, who was able to state
'.. often Toben brings students to the library, gives them no specific assignment, children extremely rude and disobedient, not the way they behave in other classes or with her. Gave further evidence that Toben is a liar.'

This was all heavy stuff, written down by the enquiry panel, without them giving me an opportunity to respond to such allegations. A more obvious breach of natural justice is not imaginable, especially in the light of this panel of enquiry being a part of the Education Department, the organisation which is entrusted with the task of imbuing our young with ethical standards, with values such as truth, honour and justice.

This panel, having written up the report, then gave gratuitous advice, something that's quite clearly not its function according to the Three Union Agreement. This advice consisted of recommending that:

'Dr Toben should be:
a) dismissed from the Teaching Service, or
b) transferred to a non-teaching administrative position, or
c) transferred to a larger city post-primary school,
with a strong preference to a).
signed: Russell Wicking, V.S.T.A. Jim Clelland, Education Department.'

If the terms of reference are altered, then surely that reflects upon those who are cooking the books. The report did not mention the fact that Ray had Principals' Association representation, in the person of Stawell Secondary Principal, Peter Martin. Why was this fact not mentioned? About two years later, this very Peter Martin tried publicly to defend the attack against my person:

'24 July 1987

Sir, - Principals on secondary schools throughout the Central Highlands-Wimmera region note with interest the front page article and letter to the editor regarding the dismissal of former teacher, Dr Fredrick Toben.
The school principal, the school staff, senior education officers, the Regional Director of Education, the Director General of Education, the Ombudsman, legal aid authorities, the media and the teacher union have been listed among those who have not supported Dr Toben.
As principals of schools we would like to take the opportunity to reassure our communities, that in cases of alleged teacher incompetence, a long process is prescribed which provides support and encouragement before a final decision is made.
In most such cases the teacher is able to remedy alleged problems and continue in the teaching service.
It is very rare for teachers to be dismissed. Where this ultimate step does occur, there is no doubt that the grounds for such dismissal are more than justified.
In Dr Toben's case the same support measures were instigated and yet dismissal resulted. As stated, no-one from unions, to Regional Director, to the Ombudsman saw fit to support Dr Toben's continued employment as a teacher.
As principles of secondary schools we voice our support for those who are now being attacked for being involved in the dismissal of Dr Toben. We are satisfied that he was given all the support advice for which provision is made in the terms and conditions of his employment. We believe he has had every opportunity to present his case.

P.J. Martin, Principal, Stawell Secondary College. C. Ekinsmith, Principal, Dimboola Memorial High School, on behalf of principals of all Central Highlands-Wimmera secondary schools."

I later contacted the various principals of the region and proved both that this letter was not put to their organisation and that the authors spoke without authority. In any case, no principal of that organisation ever approached me and asked for my side of the story.

It was therefore heartening to see that pitted against this powerful social group was the *Wimmera Mail-Times*. The fact that this tri-weekly newspaper began asking questions had unsettling effects on those who wished I would simply go away.

The editorial of 29 July headed "Inquiry needed on Toben case" highlighted some of the disturbing facts:

'The case of sacked Goroke schoolteacher Dr Fredrick Toben on the grounds of incompetence has been widely publicised and reviewed in the national media. There seems little doubt that a prima facie case for an open inquiry exists.
The State Government should order an investigation in the interests of basic justice which must be seen to be done. The government must also protect the long-term standing of Goroke Consolidated School. An inquiry employing the rules of evidence and rebuttal, of facts without sweeping generalities, is the only way to end the unfortunate Toben affair to any degree of satisfaction.
We have closely examined education Ministry documents, obtained through freedom of information. We were unable to find one specific accusation against Dr Toben other than the all-embracing charge of incompetence. Does the ministry or anyone know something that has never been disclosed to Dr Toben, that has never been included in the official confidential file on the Toben case?
On the surface it seems incredible that a doctor of philosophy with arts degrees from Melbourne and Wellington universities and 17 years teaching experience around the world can be sacked by a tribunal, or inquisition, which is not required to justify its death sentence on a career.
The raw, unpalatable truth of the Toben episode is that this man, believing himself maligned and slandered as a professional, cannot afford the cost of a legal challenge through the courts against a ministry which can draw on all the vast resources of the State Treasury. Well might public servants bask in such comfort.
It all comes down to justice at a price. If responsible and respected teachers can now come out in support of Toben after experiencing themselves the events at Goroke, the Victorian people can at least grant him the democratic right of a fair trial of appeal. This nasty, unfinished business tends to mock the principle that the accused are innocent until proven guilty.
We hold no torch, no brief for Dr Toben. We do stand for justice and fair play. We exercise our right to be convinced beyond any doubt, one way or the other. Our nagging, worrying, unsatisfied doubt persists.'

* * *

At the end of the day, when I saw Wicking and Clelland coming out of the library for a breather, I asked them whether my wife could also have her say. Though I had not asked her to attend initially, she had expressed no reservations about facing the panel.

Georgina told them how she felt about the situation, that since the permanency lie, I had become unhappy that the stress was telling on her because certain people were changing their attitude towards her.

I also asked Clelland and Wicking to have a look at my classroom, the radio studio, my student work output. But they were not interested. It seemed to me that they were not interested in anything that would strengthen my case.

Before they departed, I snatched a moment with Wicking.

"Russell, how's it going for me?" I asked. "What's your gut reaction?"

“It’s a difficult case, Fredrick,” he replied nervously. “It’s the longest and most difficult I’ve ever been on,” he concluded and extricated himself. “ I must go,” he almost whispered. “I have a long drive back to Melbourne.”

That night there was little happiness in our home. Our little fellow, however, gave us much pleasure and a real sense of purpose. After all, the family unit is dialectics materialised, objectified. The thesis is the father, the antithesis the mother, and the synthesis the child. In the child there is the *Aufhebung* of the two elements that are different. It is not, as the Marxists argue, a matter of destroying the thesis or the antithesis. That is a misreading of Hegel’s philosophical proposition.

The next morning I was, as usual, in school by 8.30 a.m. As I prepared myself in the English room, John Bell stuck his head through the door.

“You’re on your way out,” he screeched, gesturing a thumbs down. “You’re on your way out,” and he disappeared slamming shut the door.

Ray also met me in the corridor. He had a big grin on his bearded face.

“I hope you enjoyed your day in court, day in the sun, metaphorically speaking,”

“John’s just told me I’m on my way out,” I jested in return.
“He’s just responding to the way you’ve treated him,” Ray chuckled.

At lunch-time in the studio, the duty announcers asked me whether the word that Stacey and Ross were spreading about my getting the sack was true.

“I don’t know, I just don’t know. Let’s forget this business and get on with the broadcast.”

BOOK FIVE - PROFESSIONAL DEATH SENTENCE

TWENTY FIVE - STUDENT AGREEMENT

A week after the enquiry the school had settled down again, and teachers fell into their usual routine of complaining about unruly and unwilling students. Whenever I heard such comments I smiled and wondered about some of my colleagues' integrity.

Events and incidents at school followed the predictable pattern which, despite the principal's incessant call for change, was the hallmark of any mature institution. There were staff meetings, sports, excursions and overnight camps. The S.T.P. method of conducting staff meetings still applied. It was this procedure which set Mark Weegberg back a little. He had requested that his new subject, 'careers', be accepted into the school program. For want of a written program outline his proposal was put on hold. His huffing and puffing didn't affect the outcome. In the staffroom McCraw jested with Robert about the "little Dutch boy's stupid attempt" to introduce a new subject into the curriculum.

McCraw himself had additional pressures placed on him when, one afternoon after school near the post office, he carelessly reversed his car and knocked Kristina Mitchell off her bike. Edwin Mitchell reported the incident to local police senior constable Tex Drummond.

"I reported the matter promptly to the police," Edwin said, "so as to safeguard myself. I wanted the matter to rest and did not wish to cause any trouble. Seven weeks later, I received a letter from the principal, written on school letterhead paper, requesting me to pay for damage the accident had caused to his car. I again went to the police to clarify my legal position, and the matter was then proceeded with at the Nhill Magistrates' Court. Magistrate DeGrouchie dismissed the charge for want of clear evidence." McCraw, in his account of the incident, remained silent about the demand for payment of damages he had made upon Mitchell.

On Friday, 19 October, the day after McCraw had knocked Kristina off her bike, two days after I had found Robert's copy of the Support Group Report in the double room, Ray wished to talk to me about Year 10.

"It's obvious that your control over the Year 10 students is not getting any better. I'd like to suggest to you one avenue of help," he said, looking at me as though he expected me to smack his bottom. "The students are now mature enough. They don't need discipline imposed upon them. I suggest to you that we draw up an agreement, a written agreement. It will stop bad behaviour."

"Why not, Ray?" I responded. "We may as well try anything now, and honourable people honour their agreements, don't they?"

"I'll get Year 10 in here before lunch." Ray looked weary but he attempted to be enthusiastic about his new plan of establishing discipline among the Year 10 students.

As I entered his office, there was the Year 10 class, sitting very bravely on chairs brought in for the occasion. The two Julies, McPhee and Blythman, Charmaine Gurney, Rhonda Maybery, a cystic fibrosis sufferer who would not see out the year's end, and the three Ross boys, brothers Steven and Michael and cousin Mark.

McCraw addressed us in general terms, pointing out to the students that I was a highly qualified teacher. "But this does not, of course, guarantee teacher effectiveness. But Mr Toben's had extensive teaching experience. He has even taught at university level." He paused and produced a sheet of paper.

"Now we're here to draw up an agreement between Year 10 and its teacher, Mr Toben. We have only a few weeks left of this school year and it's in your interest to make this Agreement work." All students paid attention and I wondered why McCraw had not spoken to them like that before. It seemed all a little too late because ingrained disciplinary problems cannot be ironed out within a matter of days. Still, we worked through each item, then agreed to sign the typed up version.

That afternoon, Ray came into my classroom, agreement in hand, asking me to sign the typed sheet.

"But Ray," I said as I quickly browsed through the items, point 8 wasn't discussed at the meeting: 'no contact between teacher and parents is to be established, unless it is conducted through the office'.

"Ray," I insisted, "you'll have to take that out because I did not agree to this point. I don't wish to isolate myself from the parents via an agreement. That's bad." I was furious because Ray had been up to his old tricks again, that of isolating me from the general student body, from parents and the community at large. This agreement would then support his contention that I could not get along with parents, let alone with students. "O.K." he said ever so meekly, "we'll delete it." He never did.

The Agreement lasted for a few days, until Charmaine Gurney again refused to co-operate in class, after she had shouted at me: "I hate your guts, Hitler, Poof!" Her rough language, her street smartness spoiled an otherwise happy class atmosphere. The fact that Rhonda was terminally ill always brought the class back to some restraint. Gurney, however, remained unashamedly uninhibited in both language and action. She was animalistic, raw and brutal. She had suffered as a result of her family break-up, certainly. But that did not excuse her lack of restraint. As early as July 1983 her mother had spread the word that Charmaine was the niece of Member of Parliament, Bernie Dunn. Years later, it was Mrs Gurney's (now Shaw's) brother who sold then-Premier Joan Kirner an allegedly fake Aboriginal painting.

Matters came to a head on Friday 26 October, when Year 10 wished to have the lesson turned into a library period. Very few classes were operating at school. A week's camp activity had depleted most of them, and the rest were following McCraw around the school doing general maintenance work. I agreed to the students' request on the condition that the written homework exercise be completed. It was Charmaine, the last to finish the task, who sulked in the room as I stood at the door urging her to hurry up. I knew she could do her work and this was just playing about. She began her usual taunting nonsense of calling me 'Hitler' and 'Poof'. With my German background I was easy game for those whose minds had decayed at that point of world history. Propaganda of this nature, of course, was still being pushed out by the media, particularly by T.V. in the form of docudramas, which the not-so-robust mind takes as fact. Fiction indeed has become faction.

As the class slowly walked towards the library, it was Charmaine who continued to taunt me. I reminded her that when she used to baby-sit my son, Karl, she had told him "your father is a poof". I then reminded her that such talk is not very nice, not because it is rubbish but because name-calling is a non-thinking activity, a lazy mind's quagmire.

"Charmaine," I said, "would you like it if I were to go around Goroke and call you a lesbian?"

As quick as a flash she snapped, "You called me a lesbian. You heard that, Mark, didn't you, Mark?" she screeched. "He called me a lesbian!"

Mark would not have dared to contradict her and so he quickly began to write something down on his writing pad. "What nonsense," I said. "Just listen again. You've heard her call me a poof …" Mark interjected. "No, I haven't," he said, lying through his teeth.

"Now I'm saying that this is the same as if I were to call her a lesbian, which I don't do."

"There you go again," she continued to screech, "you called me a lesbian."

At that point the lunch bell sounded and Gurney and Mark Ross rushed out of the library to Mark Weegberg who just happened to walk past the library door. Excitedly she talked to Weegberg as he calmly and authoritatively took down some notes.

* * *

That Sunday afternoon, while preparing the radio studio for Monday's Year 9 play recording, I had a visitor at the door. It was Year 8's Headley Blythman, looking rather sheepish. "What's up, Headley?" I asked.

"Sir, is it true that we won't be having you for English anymore?"

"I don't know, Headley," I replied as calmly as possible, wondering what he knew that I didn't.

"Well, I heard from my sister, Julie, that she won't be having you anymore because you're not taking Year 10 English any more. Mrs Bull is taking that class now."

"Thanks for that news item, Headley," I responded to this piece of hot gossip. "We'll see on Monday, and now you can help me set up the studio."

* * *

On Monday, 29 October, I was prepared for anything. After school assembly I worked with my Year 7's in the library. Val Bull was also in the library, and I asked her about the rumour. "Val, what truth is there in the rumour that you are taking over my Year 10 English classes?"

Val stopped her work in the library office, looked at me with terror in her eyes, then literally ran from the library and fled into the staffroom. I wasn't really disturbed by such a reaction. But she would now be able to talk about my 'upsetting' her in the library.

At recess time, instead of going to the radio room, I made it a point to be in the staffroom. As soon as I entered, Ray approached me. "Fredrick," he spoke loudly, "I'd like to see you in my office after recess."

"O.K., Ray," I said, "I've got a spare."

As I walked into this now quite familiar office, I saw Mark Weegberg sitting there with writing pad on his lap, already furiously writing something - no doubt the time of my entry to Ray's office. Before anyone began to speak I asked "May I have Glenn Duncan present at this meeting?" I knew what was going to happen and I wanted a reliable witness. These two inseparable fellows would not appreciate truth in such trying times. For them, victory was to obtained at any cost.

"No, you may not," Ray said sternly. "He's teaching and we have no-one to replace him with."
"What about Val?" I asked, "She's sitting in the staffroom not doing anything."

"I think we'd better get on with it," Mark interjected, breathing heavily. Ray began to shuffle a few papers on his desk, picked up a sheet, then began to read from it.

"Due to complaints from Year 10 students and their parents about your language to those students Period 4, Friday 26th October, I have to withdraw you from contact with these students. Because of the lack of discipline and fruitful work being carried out in Year 9 classes, I am also withdrawing you from these classes.

"1. I instruct you to institute no verbal communication with these classes or their children in Year 9 and 10, unless it is to do with safety or discipline matters pertaining to children's behaviour in the school yard arising out of your allocated yard supervision duties.

"2. Where you wish to discuss children with their parents on subjects relating to school, I also instruct you to arrange these discussions through this office.

"3. I instruct you not to use objectionable language when talking to students or to anyone on school premises.

"4. I instruct you to keep the level of noise in your classes to an acceptable level.

"5. I instruct you not to leave the classroom once class has begun and not to split your classes between rooms.

"6. I instruct you to maintain an acceptable level of order in your classroom; not to allow excessive pupil movement in the room and to ensure that all the students are working on their allotted tasks for the whole lesson in a manner which is generally acceptable throughout the profession.

"7. I instruct you to carry out library tasks allotted to you by Mrs Bull during those periods previously used to teach Year 9 and 10.

"I have instructed senior staff to report breaches of these instructions to me.

"8. In your classes with Year 7 and 8 students I further instruct you to prepare brief lesson plans showing the topic of each lesson and submit them to me prior to the lessons, and during the lesson, to keep the discussion to the topic and to refrain from discussing students and their behaviour with other students.
R.A.McCraw, Principal."

As he finished reading the instructions, he looked up at me, then asked, "Have you anything to say to this?"

I was stunned. I didn't recognise myself anymore. Was the person receiving these instructions really me? I was known for my good language use and the class atmosphere generated by me was not what was depicted in those instructions. "What can I say, Ray," I responded shocked. "You have given me these instructions and I must now follow them. You didn't even ask me what happened last Friday, and now you present me with a fait accompli. What can I say but that I shall follow your instructions." I then rose from my chair and left the office to return to my classroom. But I had no time to reflect because following me I heard heavy breathing, the huffing and puffing of Weegberg, with McCraw a few steps behind him.

"We haven't finished with you yet," Mark snapped loudly, and Ray handed me another hand-written sheet.

"Dr Toben," it began, and by this time I had grown weary of the use of the Dr title. Weegberg had begun using it when the nonsense began to surface towards the end of 1983, and Mark certainly relished using it when addressing School Council on matters in which I was involved, such as the opening of the new school buildings.

McCraw's letter continued: "I instruct you to hand to Mrs Bull, by 9 am Tuesday 30th October, all relevant marks and evaluation papers, your course material and any other relevant materials for Years 9 and 10 English classes and the children in those classes.
Ray McCraw, Principal."

The final sentence made me chuckle and I said to Ray, "Ray, do you wish me to physically hand over the children to Mrs Bull?"

But Ray and Mark had disappeared as quickly as they had appeared. They had brought along their afterthought, in writing! Interestingly enough, I did have my year's work available for inspection. But other teachers did not. I wasn't surprised when Goroke Consolidated School received a huge assignment from the Correspondence School. I can't recall which teacher drove to Melbourne and collected notes for all subjects, for all years.

That evening I wrote my letter of help.

"Today my Year 9 and 10 English classes were taken away from me. Over the weekend I had heard rumours from a student that I would lose some classes. This rumour was based on fact, and the decision to take classes off me was made without asking me what had happened on Friday. The steps that a reasonable person should go through before reaching a critical decision have been discarded for the sake of predictions made to School Council concerning my future in this town. The principal fears that these predictions will not occur and so he feels he needs to discredit and humiliate me even further.

"I would like to have an opportunity of commenting on the issue raised by the principal's letter of 29 October. Independent observers would see that something is wrong. I would like to have parents and students, who have made the complaints against me, present, in order to answer the allegations. I would like to again expose the extent to which the principal is prepared to pressure and manipulate those whom he can to make his predictions come to pass. The action that he undertook today could be seen by most members of the community as a judgement from the official enquiry of three weeks ago. In order for me to receive justice the community has now to be informed of what is going on at school.

"I further pose important questions that this matter raises for me:
1. If I cannot combat such pressure, am I locked into the situation until I either transfer or break down?
2. What restraints are there imposed upon a principal who uses rumour against a teacher - when the teachers know before the teacher that he is losing classes, as I found out today?
3. How can a principal act negatively towards a teacher when an official enquiry has not handed down a decision? Surely there are basic ethical restraints that a principal has to subject himself to in the course of his duty?
4. What basic right have I as a temporary teacher against such unjust pressure from a principal? Where do I go? Who do I talk to? I've been banging on the door for help for so long and nothing seems to be happening."

I was physically at an end and mentally wrung dry. This was my desperate cry for help, and in belief that at the top of the Education Department there would still be honourable people who still had basic moral values, I sent the letter to the following:

Dr Norman Curry, Director General of Education
Dr Ken Boston, Regional Director of Education
Mr Jim Clelland, Assistant Regional Director of Education
Mr Jim Betson, Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations
Mr Russell Wicking, Assistant Secretary, VSTA
Mr Edwin Mitchell, President, Goroke School Council

Copies of the letter were made by my wife, late at night, on the Health Centre photocopier. I posted off the letters before school. I also decided that if I were to continue to play the democratic game to the full, then I would also have to give McCraw a copy of the letter. This I did by personally handing him a copy in his office. "In the spirit of open communications, Ray, here is your copy." He didn't respond to me.

While working at my new task of sorting library books and writing up index cards, I noticed the now inseparable pair, Ray and Mark, walking towards the library. A Year 5 class was in the library with its teacher, and I had my office door closed. Without knocking on the door the inseparables barged in, both - strangely - taking mincing, traumatised steps. Mark was already busy writing on a note pad.

"I instruct you to hand over your school key."

“Why, Ray?” I asked.

“Because you have not kept an accurate account of your photocopying.”

“I have not?” I asked.

“This letter of yours. You made a number of copies and you did not record this in the book.” Ray sneered triumphantly.

“Ah, Ray,” I replied, “now I know what you’re up to. If you check the quality of the paper, you will see that your copy is not printed on school photocopy paper. Your copy is of a glossy quality.” Both Ray and Mark seemed to fall apart and their firmness looked ridiculous and childish, like two bearded grown-up school boys who had just been told off for playing a naughty prank on someone.

“I still want your key,” Ray snapped.

“Is that an order, Ray?” I smiled teasingly. The humiliation attempt had backfired on both of them and I just felt like laughing about the whole incident. I felt sorry for these two fellows, bound together in a desperate attempt to get something on me that would stick, that would prove … what? That the principal’s judgement about my teaching incompetence was correct? The pettiness of it all amazed me. To think that so-called educated persons would stoop to such levels of behaviour.

“It is,” Ray said, now visibly shaking while Mark seemed to be choking on his own breath.

“There you are,” I said as I took the school key off my bunch. “Now, Mark,” I added purposefully, “make sure that your record of this incident is a correct record, not like the Sharon Lyall incident.”

Both remained silent, Ray clutching the key and Mark his pen and writing pad They then stormed out of the library to return, no doubt, to the office, there to plan the next strategic attack.

Later I was to receive copies of Mark’s written record. I was amazed at how he twisted the facts to suit the particular interpretation of events that he and Ray needed to discredit me. The sequence of events was often distorted to fit the picture they were so desperately trying to create of me. They did not shy away from outright lying either. Both Ray and Mark became emotional, the tactic used to bluff your opponent into silence, thereby continuing to be the interpreter of the facts. This, alone, remained the only weapon they had against me. It explains why they had to isolate me from other people, to set me apart. Otherwise I would have an opportunity of setting the record straight, and that would again upset them, and I would again be a terrible person because I would be the one who had ‘upset’ these gentle fellows.

* * *

The response to my ‘cry for help’ was miserable. Only Russell Wicking replied.

“I believe that a lot of problems you mentioned have arisen out of the situation leading up to and following the enquiry. There was a considerable delay at the Education Department in deciding to set up the enquiry. This meant that you and the rest of the school were held in abeyance while the decision was being made. There has been a further delay since the enquiry which arose - in part - from the difficulties experienced by J. Clelland and myself in preparing a joint report and signing that report - this also has put further pressure on you and the school community.
I do feel that the points that you have raised in your letter would not have been allowed to develop if the enquiry procedures had been conducted more efficiently by the Department.
Yours sincerely

Russell Wicking, Assistant Secretary, VSTA."

So, Russell passed the buck on to the Department. No doubt he could have mentioned names, such as Steve Macpherson or Jim Betson. But that would have caused more problems for him.

Our School Council President, Edwin Mitchell, also talked to me about the matter. For two years I had met him once a month at lodge, but I never talked about school problems. The November council meeting was due soon and he proposed to me that he find out what was going on.

Three days after the key incident, on Monday 5 November, I was again summoned into the principal's office. This time it was for a 'Humanities Faculty' meeting. This was the first time that I had heard of such a faculty at the school. In the past the English faculty was just that. Now with the latest trends in education to reduce the importance of English as a core subject, some progressives liked the idea of making English subordinate to such a wishy-washy area as 'humanities'.

"I seem to live here recently," I said as I entered the office. There were Val Bull, Mark, John and Ray in the chair, all sitting rather stiffly, not picking up my joke.

"We are meeting today," Ray began in his sweetest voice, "because we have just lost our staff entitlement of one. That means that one of you has to be declared in excess." There was no hush, no surprise or panic attack from anyone. "Now, Val," Ray continued, "what are your qualifications and what subjects can you offer?"

"Well," she twittered, "I've got a teaching diploma from the Bendigo Teachers' College, and I can teach English, history, music and library."

"Mark, you're permanent," Ray continued, "so this doesn't apply to you."

"I can offer my subject, Consumer Education, some typing and English," he burst out. And I wanted to burst out "You fraud, Mark. You can't even string together a decent sentence, let alone spell accurately." But I held my tongue.

"John," Ray chuckled, disregarding Mark's comment. "What can you offer?" An embarrassing pause fell over the meeting. Big John, second-year teacher of social science, was for once silent, not cracking a joke either. The competence spotlight lit up a glum looking face. "John," Ray helped out, "you're the school's social science teacher and you're doing valuable work on the school magazine, on play productions, etc. Now, that leaves Fredrick. What can you offer this small school?"

I knew where the whole meeting was heading, but I still listed my subjects: "English, German, history, sociology and philosophy."

"Well, that's the first step of what we have to do. Now," Ray relished the moment, "whom do we declare in excess?"

"I nominate Fredrick," Mark burst out, and before anyone could respond to this nomination by suggesting another person, John cried out, "I second that."

"Well, that's good. We all agree on this then, that Fredrick had been declared in excess. Now, Fredrick," Ray said, very calm and controlled, "you have been declared in excess. Now this does not mean that you have to leave the school at the end of the year. This is just an administrative exercise

because our needs position has been taken from this school by staffing in Melbourne. Now, would you please fill out this blue form, sign it, then hand it back to me."

Without another word, I picked up the form, thanked Ray and excused myself from the meeting. As I left the office I could hear Mark loudly exclaim to the principal, "Shouldn't Dr Toben be told when to return the form?"

I continued walking because I didn't care anymore. I knew that this little administrative exercise was also a learning exercise for Ray McCraw. This was a crash course for Ray and I was the man set up to offer him that experience. I felt cheated. That afternoon, while on bus duty, I met the School Council President, Edwin Mitchell.

"I received your letter, Fredrick. What's going on at school?"

"Ray doesn't like me. He thinks I'm not good enough for this school."

"I'll raise the matter at School Council. We've got just two meetings before the end of the year. I'll talk to Ray about this so that we can clear up this matter."

* * *

My being declared in excess was duly notified to Jim Betson, DPIR. On 22 November, after the infamous 6 November School Council meeting, he wrote:

"Dear Jim
Following our conversation yesterday at Horsham re Dr Toben, enclosed is a copy of the letter to Dr Curry. Can I formally request in line with point 1 of the above letter that Dr Toben be removed from our staffing list so that another appointment can be made?
On our SR85 he was declared in excess so he would be taken out of the school. To enable this to be done our Librarian was taken out of the Library to take English for 1985.
Our establishment has been increased by 0.6 to 10.1 since the SR85 has been sent in thus creating a vacancy. A History/English teacher, Rosalind Bradley, at Horsham High School has put in a teacher-requested transfer for Goroke. If she could be appointed it would solve all our problems.
Does the fact that Dr Toben is only a temporary teacher make his removal from the system any easier?
Yours faithfully,
Ray A. McCraw, Princ."

Of course, McCraw's latest prediction, that my removal from school would 'solve all our problems', besides being deceptive, would not come to pass. Even without my presence at the school problems continued to emerge.

McCraw's letter dated 20.11 to the Director General of Education, Dr Norman Curry, again suggested that I had caused all the problems at the school. Blaming the victim and scape-goating are techniques as old as human nature. They reveal what level of maturity a person, an organisation, a society has reached.

"Dear Dr Curry,
re Dr G.F.Toben and his position at this school
Thank you for initiating the prompt action with regards Dr Toben and the disturbance at this school. Dr Boston's visit to the school, his discussion with the staff, and the removal of Dr Toben to Regional Office Horsham, have all combined to take the heat out of the issue at the school level.
I am writing to request that action as a result of the enquiry be undertaken as soon as possible as an unresolved situation is still having harmful effects on the school as well as, I'm sure, on Dr Toben.
Two immediate effects on the school are:
1. With staffing decisions being made with regard to 1985 at the moment and a young English teacher in Horsham wishing to transfer to Goroke, the fact that he remains on our staff list but not at the school may cause this lass to miss out on a position she desires.
2. Dr Toben currently occupies a residence attached to the school. Another teacher (married) who travels 56 km from Nhill wishes to move to Goroke but may not be able to do so if a decision re Dr Toben is delayed. Because we work in a small community there is a lot

of public interest in this matter and as long as it remains unresolved the image of the school is somewhat tarnished. The staff are well aware of this, but because of their professionalism and ethics have decided not to comment on the issue publicly.
We are all well aware that the decision should not be rushed and, after Dr Boston's discussion, aware that great care must be taken to reach a correct decision. I do urge however, that no time be allowed to slip by unnecessarily, thus penalising the school further.
Yours faithfully,
Ray A. McCraw, Principal."

McCraw also thanked the Regional Director for his help:

"Dear Ken,
Many thanks for your visit to school recently to help our situation here. The removal of Fredrick and your discussion with staff have removed the heat from the situation here. The school is nearly back to normal and is running smoothly. I would like to express my personal thanks for your help, support and the action you initiated. As you would be well aware, a Principal of a school has very few sources of help to turn to and I'm very grateful that when I asked for it, your assistance was quick and effective. The direct line of authority from Principal to the Regional Director on, upwards, places the school Principal in a fairly weak position when dealing with middle level directorate people on either side of this line, so your actions have been doubly appreciated. For your information I have included recent letters to both Jim Betson and Dr Curry.
We have received a pile of work folders and some marks from Fredrick via John Nunn The details of the work done before he was removed from the school have not been supplied as requested. The only record we have are the few sheets in the folder.
Once again, thank you for your assistance.
Yours faithfully,
Ray A. McCraw, Princ."

Boston added hand-written comments on the letter: "Send copy to John Nunn (Strictly confidential - not for Dr Toben) John - can you attend to this? All such material must be returned to the school through you. KGB."

TWENTY SIX - FOLLOW ME

I didn't really mind working in the library. Books have been my pleasure and behind every book there is a fascinating creator. McCraw's home had very few books. He once told me that he hated reading but that his father, a minister of religion, forced him to read the Bible.

I had no such problems. No-one ever forced me to read a book. I like reading and writing. I attempted to imbue my students with an appreciation for books, but in our present age the visual, the video has a greater pull on their interests.

It still disturbs me to read what librarian, Val Bull, told the enquiry about how I conducted library lessons. I initially take all criticism to heart, then soul search for the truth, and either reject criticism or accept it. I had to laugh at Val's criticism because I merely needed to read what the St Arnaud High School librarian had to say about me:

"Mr Fredrick Toben joined the staff at St Arnaud High School in July 1982. As the Librarian I had close contact with him in providing him with resources for his teaching programmes. I found him an interesting and thoughtful man of strong views and a very correct didactic manner. Part of his English teaching involved bringing his classes to the library for research and reading assignments. He was a very strict though fair teacher with high expectations of his students. He ran a very interesting radio programme with a group of Year 9 students at one stage, which provided one group with a very rewarding experience.
Joan M. Barrance, Librarian."

Of course, I forget that McCraw was initially also favourably disposed towards me. But then I had apparently changed. Amazing, isn't it? At 40, in the prime of my life, I had changed - and naturally for the worse. My desire to teach, to help students become literate, was evaluated by McCraw and considered to be unsuitable and ineffective - dangerous even! I was not a fit and proper person to be trusted with children. In light of the VCE controversy, such judgements, implied or openly stated, made me stronger, gave me the strength to continue the battle.

From 29 October onwards, after I had lost my Year 9 and 10 classes, McCraw and Weegberg assumed a wild, fierce countenance, following me around the school, two bearded primevals stalking their wounded prey. Though not mortally, I was indeed wounded.

Perhaps I was also puzzled how a union representative (Mark represented the VSTA at Goroke) could be so unhelpful towards one of the members he claimed to care for. The collusion problem between employer and employee - in this case McCraw and Weegberg - highlighted the more general problem of unionism as such. What mental framework caused Weegberg to fully support the principal and reject helping me? Was it his deputy principal status that caused him to align himself so totally with the administrator of the school? Or was he merely driven by personal motives, by a disturbing and pathetic sense of power?

The problem at Goroke was also a problem of size, and although Weegberg and Reid had been given David Hatherell's Deputy Principal's position, the school, in fact, had no provisions for such a position. The title was fictitious! Weegberg knew it - and so did McCraw. Both of them, therefore, had no problem in throwing truth out the window, especially when it came to justifying an unreasonable action. When McCraw wrote his report about my removal from class he falsified the sequence of events. He did not ask me what had happened the previous Friday. Instead, he read out to me his list of instructions which he had already prepared, long before he invited me to his office to discuss the matter.

Those who know me know that I never refuse an invitation to put my point of view, to present my case. Yet, in his account of things, McCraw stated that I had refused to discuss the issue with him. Weegberg

supported him in this mater. McCraw's distortions, and those of the two Year 10 students, Charmaine Gurney and Mark Ross, make interesting reading because they suggest that I am absolutely unreasonable, and that I have a foul mouth. Again, those teachers who know me know that I always attempt to set a personal example to my students.

'30.10.84
Sir,
Yesterday I had a conversation with Dr Boston re Dr Toben, a teacher at this school, and his activities re a Year 10 English class last Friday, 26th October, 1984. The details are as follows:
Dr Toben had a class of 7 children. Six children were sent to the library and one was left to finish work in her room. Dr Toben initiated a discussion of an A.B.C. program "Barriers of the Mind" which dealt with schizophrenia. He told Michael Ross that one of the patients had a Hitler fixation "just like the Year 10 students had" and that Charmaine Gurney (one of the class) would end up a schizophrenic.
Michael Ross told this to Charmaine Gurney a couple of minutes later in the library and she challenged Dr Toben about the statement. In an acrimonious discussion which followed he told Charmaine she had sexual problems. Other children joined in the debate and Dr Toben called Mark Ross "the biggest shit-stirrer in the school and the ring-leader of all the trouble".
He accused all the children of trying to set him up. Mrs Gurney called in to see me at the weekend to discuss the matter and I requested her to leave it in my hands.
Monday morning I discussed the matter with an acting Senior Teacher - Mr Weegberg - and the entire Year 10 class and obtained the above details. I requested Dr Toben to discuss the issue and he refused to do so. I rang Dr Boston and with his agreement and I believe that of yourself and Dr Dunstan, Dr Toben was removed from his teaching duties of Years 9 and 10 and replaced by Mrs Bull, the Librarian. I then issued him with the attached set of instructions including the hand-written one.
This morning at 11:00 am I asked had he complied with my hand-written instructions to give Mrs Bull the marks and records of courses he previously taught.
He evaded answering and when I pressed stated he would not comply with my instructions to give Mrs Bull the marks as he was waiting for "advice" and that he would not hand over details of past course work as they were his property and copyright. I repeated my instruction and he again refused; I stated I would write these details to Dr Curry and he walked out of the room.
I formally complain to you about his language to students (there are documented incidents of previous bad language) and his unwillingness to obey a lawful instruction and request that he be removed from duty immediately and that I be given permission to engage an emergency teacher to replace him in his classroom duties. I would further point out that I mailed original statement of complaint about Dr Toben to you on Friday, 27 August; after a delay of eight weeks (less one day) the enquiry was held and the report of that enquiry took two weeks and four days to reach Melbourne.
I find this delay intolerable - the staff and myself diligently carried out the intent and actual instructions of the 3 Union Agreement to the letter. The action taken was extremely stressful for all concerned but we felt it our professional duty to go through it. Since the action has passed beyond the school, both staff and I feel that we and the students have not been supported by the central administration of the Education Department.
It is a reasonable expectation that the central administration diligently pursue matters of this nature to ensure a speedy resolution. Teachers in schools have the right to be helped and supported through speedy action by their superior. I feel this has not happened in this case. Kind words and platitudes are not enough. Action is appreciated.
Action of this kind is not initiated by schools unless there is a real need for it: the children in classes should not be educationally disadvantaged. Because of the long delays in this case the education of the children at this school has suffered. This again is very upsetting for both parents and staff.
It would be appear that those schools who step outside quiet and agreed procedures are dealt with speedily but those who work within the system are ignored or pushed aside I have worked through official channels at all times and the result is that I feel as though not enough has been done and that my expectation of quick action in the resolution of an urgent and important matter has not been met.
I would appreciate, as I am sure Dr Toben, the subject of this action would appreciate, a speedy resolution of the matter.
I formally request that this matter be proceeded with urgently, and that all personnel needed to deal with it were made available immediately.
Your faithfully,
Ray A. McCraw, Princ.'

The extraordinary length to which McCraw went to have me silenced was seen later during the 7 November School Council meeting. The problem facing McCraw was that I could talk, that I could clarify and explain matters. This explains why he continually had to stress my apparent unreasonableness and unwillingness to answer his questions. This was all far from the truth. On Monday, 29 October, he had already prepared his list of instructions and he never intended to give me a right of reply. He didn't wish to find out what happened. He already knew. Like the Director General after him, McCraw preferred to listen to students rather than to me. Their tales would corroborate his theory that I was an incompetent teacher. Collecting 'facts' to prove the theory was McCraw's burning ambition. On that he would build his reputation. And like the communist system, which continually collected facts to support the theory, in time the facts become distortions of facts - and the theory loses

all connection to reality. Then the theory has become an ideology - and that's something wherein truth has an uncomfortable home.

* * *

On the day I lost my classes, Mark continued to follow me around, even to my bus duty after school. He stood a few paces away from me, clipboard in hand and writing. Intermittently he would look up at me as if to convince himself that I was still there, then continue writing. The Minimay bus was late and all other buses had departed - but not Mark. Bus students asked me what Mr Weegberg was doing.

"I don't know," I replied. "Come on, Mark," I called out, "I'll manage to carry out my bus duty without your help. Why don't you go away and fill your belly with beer?" Mark began to huff and puff, then walked back into the school office area.

Tuesday, 10 October, was a repeat of the day before. Mark and McCraw were inseparable. I decided to travel to Ballaarat after school, to attend the Australian College of Education's annual chapter meeting. I asked Karen Reid to take the bus duty for me, and although she also wished to get away from Goroke after school, travelling to Horsham, she agreed to cover my bus duty. My brother, Tony, wished me to do a job for him at Beaufort where he had obtained his automatic wool press. I was therefore expecting him at the school around home time.

Around 3:25 p.m. I left the library and walked to the office block's toilet. As I emerged from the toilet I informed Julie-Ann that I expected my brother and I asked whether she had seen him. She looked at me, then ran out of her office area into the staffroom, without talking to me. By this time I could see Tony outside the school fence, standing next to his Subaru. At this point Julie-Ann had returned to her office and the bell monitor, Bridget Carracher, rang the 3:30pm end-of-school bell. Mark, who had been standing next to me, as always writing furiously, checked the bell time.

"Yes, Mark," I said, "it's on time and I'm off. Have a good day." He remained silent but stared at me, wild, momentarily resting from his writing exercise, then strutted into Ray's office.

My twin brother told me what had happened at school around 3 p.m. when he arrived to speak to Ray. "I asked whether I could visit you in the library because I had to give you some documentation for Beaufort. Ray McCraw just refused and told me to get out of the office, off the school premises, otherwise he'd call the police. I invited him to do just that."

"Indeed. Usually guests to the school, parents and friends, can sit in the office foyer and wait until the appropriate time. You must have 'upset' him by your mere presence. No doubt you were rude, too!" I jested.

"Well, he got on to the police and I was advised to just wait outside the school grounds. It was nice to do that, especially in hot weather," he laughed. "I just wanted a little of that air conditioning but it seems he didn't even want me to remain cool. He certainly wasn't cool himself."

That evening, after returning from Ballaarat, my wife told me that she needed a break, that she wished to take our son, Karl, to her mother for Christmas. Her family was having a final reunion in Swaziland. I didn't oppose this move of hers. I knew that she had already taken as much as she could. Some would say that it was at this point that I needed her most. I did. But what can you do when that support is not freely forthcoming? Any relationship built on love and understanding, and not on fear and dominance, ought to last the distance.

* * *

Mark's diligence again paid off for McCraw. The Education Department's legal officers, Levin, Drossinos and Dear, knew what to do with the fabricated allegations authored by Weegberg. They

turned them into concrete allegations. Of the 11 allegations contained in the 13 December 1984 letter of allegations, Weegberg's good work became Allegations 7 to 11:

'7. That on the 29th October, 1984 at or about 11.39 am you failed to obey the lawful instruction of the Principal, Mr McCraw, namely that when he requested you to go to the library you failed to do so.
8. That on the 29th October, 1984 at about 11.48 am you failed to obey the lawful instruction of the Principal, Mr McCraw, namely that you did not provide to another teacher at the school the marks and information relating to Year 9 and 10 students.
9. That on the 30th October, 1984 you failed to obey a written instruction given to you by the Principal, Mr McCraw, on the 29th October 1984, namely that you were to hand to Mrs Bull, by 9 am Tuesday 30th October, 1984, all marks and evaluation papers, your course material, and any other relevant materials for Years 9 and 10 English classes and the children in those classes.
10. That on the 30th October, 1984 at about 11 am you failed to obey the lawful instruction of the Principal, Mr McCraw, when he requested you to comply with his hand-written instruction of the 29th October, 1984.
11. That on the 30th October, 1984 you failed to obey the lawful instruction of the Principal, Mr McCraw, namely that you committed the following breaches:
a) you failed to carry out your timetabled duties; and
b) you left the school early without being given permission to do so by the Principal.'

I was amazed to read these allegations, and so - later - was Judge Strong, especially because of the time sequence at which I was alleged to have committed the offences. On Friday, 2 November, McCraw felt pleased with these allegations. He informed Jim Betson thus:

'Further to the matter of Dr Fredrick Toben. Attached is a set of instructions handed to him from me on October 29th. On October 30th Dr Toben was again asked for his brief lesson plans for Year 8 and told again that they were required before each lesson. As of this date 2.11.84 - 10.00 am he has not complied with this instruction for any classes.
I wish to formally advise that he has refused to follow a lawful and reasonable instruction and request that appropriate action be taken.
Yours faithfully,
Ray A. McCraw, Princ.'

Also on this day, Goroke Consolidated School held its annual fete day. Every student was involved in some form of activity, raising money for the school. Teachers also organised activities. Glenn had prepared a target board filled with mug shots of all teachers. He placed my photo in the bulls-eye.

"Come on, don't you think this will please your enemies?" he humoured me.

"Why not?" I replied. "After all, didn't the enquiry panel say that I had no sense of humour?"

And so the bulls-eye became a popular target. And I became 'popular'. Students thought I'd become a good sport, all except Charmaine Gurney and Mark Ross. Whenever they saw me, they would contort their faces and slink off. Parents also approached me with ease. There were no tensions between myself and the parents who weren't in on things.
Then something strange happened. Mark Ross approached me, despite the Agreement's specific instruction that contact between Year 10 and myself was not to occur.
"Mr Toben," he began, "what are you going to do when you get the sack from the Department at the end of the year?"

I was stunned. "What do you mean, Mark," I asked. But he had already taken off. Three days later I was declared in excess - but still not dismissed, just hanging in there for a few more days.

TWENTY SEVEN - A WEEK IN NOVEMBER

Monday, 5 November

Weegberg, Bell, Bull and McCraw declared me in excess. My qualifications were considered to be the least suited for the school.

Tuesday, 6 November

The monthly School Council meeting at 8pm was the most disturbing event ever experienced by seasoned School Councillors, by the school community and by the Goroke community at large. Otherwise quiet and reasonable persons shouted abuse at one another. Never in the life of the council could anyone recall such forms of behaviour. Was this a result of my letter to Council President, Edwin Mitchell? Or was it because someone had submitted to the Free Press, an information paper sponsored by the local Apex club, the following item:

This is our school, out children's future - are we going to stand by and see a good teacher forced out because of a personality clash? Stand up and be counted, write a letter today.
Concerned parents.

The disturbing aspect was that because policy states all items must be signed, this item was not printed but handed to the principal, who referred to it during his hour-long speech to Council. It seemed that I was receiving some support form outside of School Council. What also came to the fore was the fact that my son, Karl, who was attending kindergarten, was asking the question: "My daddy is a good man, isn't he?"

McCraw addressed Council about the Toben affair. He traced the beginnings of it, when he, McCraw, had found me incompetent, unable to get along with students, staff and parents. "Students began to suffer," McCraw velveted along, oozing charm - something he was quite capable of doing when there was a win-lose situation. "And his incompetence was confirmed by the Support Group's work of four weeks. An enquiry followed this because Dr Toben refused to transfer out of the school. I had to remove him from classes because he abused the children with foul language and he couldn't control their behaviour. His classes were unproductive and no meaningful learning was taking place in them."

"But didn't you tell us that before, three months ago, after the Support Group had concluded he was unfit to teach?" Kevin smiled at Ray.

"I don't understand your question, Kevin," Ray replied.

"Didn't you say then that students were still getting English instruction and they were not suffering in any way?"

"I want to know," Stuart Bethune interjected just in time, "how he insulted students."

Kevin quickly slipped out of the meeting and used the office telephone to call me. "Listen, Fred," he almost whispered., "I'm at the School Council meeting and Whiskers is laying it on a bit thick. I think you should come along as a visitor. He's got his boys there as well." Kevin was referring to McCraw's coterie - Ferlazzo, Weegberg, Bell, Bull, Reid and Stehn.

I didn't need a second invitation to put my point across. As I entered the staffroom, I saw Edwin Mitchell chairing the meeting. He stopped the meeting and said: "I'd like to inform the guests here

tonight that you are not permitted to make any statements. You are permitted to answer questions, but then only with a 'yes' or 'no'. This is an information-gathering exercise only. Visitors may answer questions only."

Suddenly I was the focus of attention.

"Did you call Charmaine Gurney a lesbian?" asked Stuart Bethune, the local plumber.

"No, I did not," I responded.

"Did you call Mark Ross a 'shit stirrer'?"

"Yes, I did," I answered unashamedly, "because it's true."

"Only answer the question. You are not allowed to make a statement," our teacher representative on School Council, Mark Weegberg shouted across the room. "The rules we agreed on for visitors at this Council meeting give you no right to make statements."

Heggie had sat himself next to student representatives, Stacey and Ross. If the proverbial looks could kill, then Mark Ross had me dead over a hundred times. McCraw briefly mentioned the incident involving my brother's appearance at the school. "I have mentioned all this to our Regional Director, Dr Ken Boston. He agreed with me that I handled the situation correctly. In fact, he said he would have hit that fellow Toben."

There was no reason for me to remain at the meeting. I was told later that McCraw wished to have School Council endorse his actions. "I am seeking your full support on this matter, that my action is supported by School Council." As John Crabtree told me later, "It never got to the vote because people left the meeting. Ron Hawkins took off followed by others, and then McCraw. The meeting was never properly closed. The principal did not get the full unreserved support that he was asking for."

School Councillor Brian Mann would briefly recount events in his letter to the Wimmera Mail Times. On August 5th, 1987, he wrote the following:

'Sir, - I believe it is time for the public to be better informed about the dismissal of Dr Fredrick Toben. Goroke, being a Consolidated School, has both primary and secondary sections, but without a complete secondary section a primary teacher becomes principal. In this case a principal from a primary school background decided that a secondary teacher who was higher qualified than himself was incompetent.

Mr Peter Martin's letter, Mail Times July 24, said that it was very rare for a teacher to be dismissed yet there were two teachers in 1984 facing dismissal procedures with support groups placed on them. Two other teachers felt very insecure because they felt their positions were also threatened. A teacher cannot be sacked without first having a support group in an attempt to overcome his or her teaching problems. This rule has merit, particularly for a first year teacher who is having trouble finding his or her feet. It gives them a chance to draw on the experience of older teachers. But if a principal wants to sack a teacher this rule stands in the way of instant dismissal. A support group must be used, even if it only goes through the motions, so it appears that correct procedures have been followed.

If Dr Toben had transferred, as did another teacher, he would not have been dismissed. When support was withdrawn from Dr Toben, some students were quick to take advantage. A student who knew disciplinary steps would not be taken against him or her could get away with very disruptive behaviour. This made it even more difficult for Dr Toben, yet his peers accused him of having noisy

classes and that discipline was a problem. Dr Toben was also accused of having an accent which made it difficult for students to understand him. The truth is that Dr Toben speaks perfect English and that others on the staff might have followed his example. Not only was Dr Toben well spoken, he was well dressed, clean-cut, a non-smoker, and of sober habits, again an example others might have followed.

Although Dr Toben was considered incompetent his allocated teaching periods were increased to the maximum allowable. One would believe a teacher considered incompetent should have his contact with pupils minimised, not maximised. It meant Dr Toben had minimum time to prepare his defence. It also gave another teacher more time in which to follow Dr Toben with pen and note pad so that anything which would be used against him could be recorded. It was also very humiliating.

Because Goroke Consolidated School has secondary education it is entitled to, and has, two student representatives on the school council. The dismissal proceedings of Dr Toben in the first part remained an internal matter with many school councillors largely unaware of what was taking place within the school. The situation remained internal until the mater was brought to school council in October 1984. An attempt was made to hasten the mater and strengthen the case against Dr Toben by bringing in on-side teachers as visitors to the school council. The council, however, adjourned for a brief period so that visitors could be admitted including Dr Toben. Visitors were admitted on the understanding they could answer questions but not make statements. Previous to this, one person spoke for about 30 minutes presenting his side of the story. Yet Dr Toben had no right of reply. When Dr Toben was answering questions, any attempt to further explain the situation was rudely interrupted by a teacher representative on the school council. That teacher was one of the rudest men I have ever seen at a meeting. His presence and the presence of the student representatives on the council greatly gagged debate. While I don't question the place of student representatives on the school council, this is one time when parents should have been able to talk about a painful matter without the presence of two students whose English teacher was facing dismissal proceedings.

Student representatives on school councils have full voting rights. Proper proceedings might have been followed but if the case against Toben had been strong so much lobbying would have been unnecessary. Before the end of the October meeting of school council the principal threw his papers on the desk and walked out. Immediately a teacher representative moved that former council president, Mr Kevin Johnson be removed from the school council for missing two consecutive meetings without apology. The former president had been giving Dr Toben some support. At this stage, the centenary committee, of which the former president was member, was organising a back to school and his group was meeting the same night as the school council. This made no difference. The rules were applied and Mr Johnson was excluded from the school council. Kevin Johnson had been school council president during the building and opening of the new school at Goroke and many hours of organising took place from Kevin's home.

Edwin Mitchell, school council president, had an extremely difficult duty in chairing that October meeting. In fairness, he tried to allow both sides to be heard. This was made impossible by the rude interjections of one teacher. Yet after the meeting, another teacher who was admitted as a visitor accused the president of bias. All the trauma associated with the dismissal proceedings began to take its toll on teacher morale. They had been pressured continually for a long period. The teachers all wanted the matter resolved quickly so the school could settle down. Some felt their nerves were at breaking point. Some felt the October school council meeting didn't go far enough so a staff meeting was called the next morning and lasted until dinner time. Dr Toben was excluded from the meeting, which meant an allegedly incompetent teacher was left to look after all the students. The result of the meeting is best forgotten. When so many had reached breaking point the meeting soon broke down. Tears, emotionally charged outbursts and a teacher running away only to be 'rescued' by another was part of that sad meeting. Indeed, it is best forgotten.

If there was a strong case for dismissal, why the need to drag so many into the conflict causing such a disruptive effect on the school? Dr Toben was a secondary teacher so why drag primary teachers into the conflict? The dismissal of Dr Toben did take place. It is a process which has no right of appeal, which questions the very essence of democracy. How can the dismissal of a teacher be so final that there is no right of appeal against trumped-up charges?

It appears Dr Toben had been behind in the syllabus because his former pupils were crammed with written work in the last weeks of school. But this was another fabrication because his students transferring to other schools found themselves weeks ahead of their classmates in the new year's work. Mr Peter Martin's letter in the Mail Times of July 24 obviously tried to close the door on the Toben affair. But behind the door is a very untidy room, so please Mr Martin tidy the room before turning the key. Presently Goroke has an excellent school and staff and no comment or view expressed should be seen as a reflection toward them.'

Farmer Brian Mann was courageous when he wrote this letter because his wife, Lynn, was actively involved in the school's parent's club, being its president in 1987. By this time, however, McCraw had left the school, and during 1986 his one-year successor, John Wools-Cobb, successfully united the community - by giving the Centenary of Education committee its much-deserved public recognition. He also wrote me a reference in the hope that this would help me re-enter the teaching profession.:

'To Whom it May Concern.

It has been my privilege to have known Fredrick Toben since 1986 when I was appointed Principal of Goroke Consolidated School prior to my retirement after 33 years service.

During that year, I became socially associated with him because of mutual interests in Classical Music, German and English Language and Literature, Politics and, to a lesser degree, the game of Chess. I have always found him to be an affable companion, a profound thinker and, though dogmatic in expressing his point of view, is able to accept an alternative cogent argument.

Prior to my appointment, Fredrick had been dismissed from the Education Department on the grounds of 'incompetence' which I found difficult to reconcile with my knowledge of the man.

The township of Goroke was divided on the merits or otherwise of this action and this had a marked effect on Fredrick's personal circumstances. He had a deep sense of wrongful dismissal and made every effort to have this overturned and was subsequently vindicated in a court decision for which he received compensation.

I endorse his decision to gain a post in the Teaching Service and feel that his particular skills would benefit those in the Senior school rather than pupils in the middle or lower schools. Of his teaching prowess, I have no knowledge but, of his personal qualities as I have observed them, he has integrity, diligence (evidenced by his Ph.D) perseverance (evidenced by his court action) and a deep commitment to anything he undertakes.

I wish him well in any position to which he is appointed.

John Wools-Cobb, B.ED, TPTC (retired).'

John was a real professional who did not suffer fools gladly. Nor did he suffer golf courses that weren't up to scratch for fear of upsetting his handicap. Together with his wife he fully integrated into the Goroke community. It seemed unfortunate that within the first few weeks of arriving at Goroke his wife slipped and broke her wrist. However, she found that even in remote country Victoria health services were available to her. Her fracture did not set properly the first time and required a painful re-setting. When they left Goroke at the end of 1986 it was Clive Bland who transported their possessions to their country residence in the mountains near Myrtleford.

Wednesday, 7 November

As the school bell signalled the beginning of period one, Ray informed staff there would be an emergency meeting. "I'd like to report what happened last night at Council meeting," he began. "Some of you were not there. Fredrick discredited me before School Council."

I immediately interjected "That's not true. I merely wished to defend myself against the charge that I was responsible for all the trouble at the school."

“You called me a liar,” shouted Ray.

“That’s true,” I replied. “You lied to me about my permanency application.”

“We’re not getting anywhere like this,” Robert snapped. “I vote Fredrick out of this meeting.”

“I’ll second that,” shouted Mark, jumping to his feet.

“Those in favour?” Ray asked.

A mechanical show of hands followed, like at those union meeting where the heavies wait in the wings to fix up afterwards those who dare to vote against them. I didn’t even count the hands.

“That’s unanimous, there’s no one against.”

And so I marched out of the room. Later I wondered whether I should have rejected my spirit of democracy - when you’re not wanted, then go freely. I left without protest. Around the school I saw bewildered students milling about the office block entrance, and in the corridor itself.

“What’s going on, sir?” Chris asked me.

“Oh, I’ve just been thrown out of the staff meeting,” I replied smiling. I did think it was all quite amusing. Here we have a school in which a democratic spirit is meant to prevail, I mused to myself, and now a vital discussion has become a closed meeting, excluding one of the persons against whom serious allegations have been made. I walked around the school yard and checked on the students, then returned to the office area because I wished to telephone Jim Clelland.

“Just go along with it. Don’t react,” he advised me. As I replaced the receiver the staffroom door opened and Glenn appeared. “What’s happened, Glenn?” I asked.

“After you got thrown out,” he recounted almost breathlessly, “I asked Ray what he meant by calling me naïve. And Ray’s protector, Robert, nearly threw his cup at me. He raised his cup in a kind of fascist salute, then proposed that I, too, be voted out. And that’s what they did. Not all hands were raised, but it was more than half.”

“I don’t believe it, Glenn,” I responded. “These people call themselves educators and they have to silence us like this.”

Just before lunch time, a student said I was wanted in the office. I was puzzled because staff were still in closed conference in the staffroom. Five school councillors greeted me in Ray’s office. They wished to briefly hear my side of the conflict, then informed me that the following day there would be a notice in the Free Press about the trouble at the school. They also informed me that they were not giving Ray their unqualified support for his actions against me, but that they supported the move to have the conflict resolved as soon as possible.

‘At present there is an investigation underway of a secondary at the Goroke Consolidated School. It is being undertaken by officers of the Education Department outside the school. Basically this investigation has been brought about by the refusal of permanency for the teacher concerned and was investigated by the Principal in line with standing instructions issued by the Education Department.

The School Council totally supports the Principal in his efforts to resolve the situation and feel that the correct procedures have been followed.'

It was signed by: Angy Fikaris, Ron Hawkins, Geoff Carracher, Neil and Joan Hiscock, Edwin Mitchell, Loraine Schuller, Mac Hausler and Stan Walter. During the exchange of documents a copy of this letter had an addition which the original did not carry: 'This motion was passed at the last School Council meeting on Tuesday night. Some Councillors could not be reached for their signatures in time for this notice to be printed in the "Free Press". However, all school councillors support this motion and the omission of their signatures simply means that they live too far out of town to be contacted quickly.'

Absent were R. Gabbe, B. Burns, S. Bethune, J. Crabtree, L. Okely, G. Breen, B. Mann, C. Stehn. The following put their names elsewhere: M. Ross, B. Stacey, B. Heggie, C. Coutts, S. Campbell, Peta Cummings, M. Weegberg, J. Ryan, and R. McCraw

The paragraph added to the original is thus evidence of further cooking of the books. It is the same pattern which I found throughout my battle with the principal. Facts are added to, then distorted and twisted to end up as outright lies. The fact that the added paragraph is called a motion is already misleading. A motion like that was never passed at the fractured 6 November 1984 School Council meeting.

That night Russell Wicking rang me at home, around 8pm. "Yes, I've heard about the developments at Goroke," he sounded angry "Staff is refusing to teach with you at the school. We therefore have no option but to take you out of the school."

"But, Russell," I almost pleaded, "what have I done wrong? What have I done to deserve this kind of treatment? The parallel between my case and Benalla Tech is becoming all the more apparent, except there a group of teachers is pushing against a principal."

"Your case is completely different," he said impatiently. "I told you that before, you haven't got the numbers," he almost shouted.

"O.K., O.K., Russell," I said, "I get the message. Thanks for your information."

Thursday, 8 November

I arrived at school around 8 am, because I had a job to do. My well-decorated classroom walls, my personal effects, my souvenirs, all these items had to be taken down, packed up and taken home. I knew this was my final day at school - and the pain was great.

I had Year 8 English first up and the students sensed that something was wrong. The barren classroom was not the same - where was its warmth, its stimulation? I wrote a final thought for the day on my board: 'Gossip is gutless', but no one seemed to look at the board. There was sadness in the class - yet I continued as before.

I completed my yard duty at recess time. Afterwards I had Year 7 English. Again students asked what was happening and I replied that I didn't know. Soon after commencement of the lesson, Ray entered the room and advised me he would look after the class because Ken Boston was waiting for me in his office.

I saw John Nunn sitting on a chair next to the principal's desk, and Ken Boston sat on Ray's chair.

“Let me quickly get to the point,” Ken addressed me without formalities. “My main concern must lie with the school, to re-establish peace and a harmonious working relationship between the staff-staff and staff-students. I have therefore decided to take you out of the school You’ll be re-located at the Horsham regional office, where John Nunn will be your supervisor, until the end of the school year.”

I looked at Ken, then at John,. “I want this in writing, Ken.”

“I’ll do that for you,” he said. “You may as well take the day off and go home,” he added with a smile.

I again looked at both men, then began to tremble mildly, and tears flowed silently but freely down my cheeks. Ken and John looked embarrassed, and so I walked out of the office, along the corridor, past my English room, out the side door. There was no farewell to my students - the most painful part of this whole business. After 17 years of dealing with students at all levels, I now left the school like a common criminal, shunned, expelled. Now I know how Baruch Spinoza must have felt when his Jewish community expelled him amidst a barrage of obscene curses. “What a way to go!” I repeated to myself over and over again. “What a disgrace to the family, to the family name! What an example for my son! What a disgrace for my dear wife! The shame of it” - and I sighed a thousand Lady Macbeth sighs.

Friday, 9 November

When I arrived at Regional Office, Horsham, John Nunn greeted me warmly, and so did Jim Clelland. It was a very relaxed atmosphere. Coffee facilities were good and I had an office to myself. It had belonged to Graeme Robertson, the education officer who had overseen the TEAC-funded radio activity at Goroke. It was comfortable and the new surroundings helped me forget the events of the past few days.

Before lunch, John handed me a letter from Ken. It was the promised letter concerning my situation at Regional Office, dated 8 November, 1984.

‘Dear Dr Toben

During our conversation at Goroke Consolidated School earlier today you requested that the following matters be put in writing and I agreed to do so. As from Friday 9 November you will report for duty to the Horsham Education Office. This arrangement will continue until a decision has been made on the report of the recent departmental enquiry. Your work will be under the supervision of Mr John Nunn, Senior Education Officer. Hours of attendance will be normal school hours, as arranged by Mr Nunn. No travel allowance will be payable, although Mr Nunn is empowered to authorise your use of the Goroke to Horsham school bus subject to the requirement that you do not discuss any matter relating to Goroke Consolidated School with other travellers.

I direct you not to visit Goroke Consolidated School at any time during the period of your attachment to the Horsham Office. I also request you to provide immediately to Mr Nunn a copy of all marks and other forms of assessment of students’ work in your possession, and to return to him any essays or other original student material you are holding.

I have arranged for the principal of Goroke Consolidated School to have your fortnightly cheque delivered to your home on the day it arrives in Goroke. Your status in the Horsham Office is that of a teacher temporarily attached to the office, not that of a member of the regional staff. I request you not to discuss matters relating to Goroke Consolidated School with our regional education or administrative staff, or with teachers and other visitors to the office. I have made it clear to you, and to the principal, teachers and council members of Goroke Consolidated School, that your attachment to the Horsham Office in no way prejudges the outcome of the departmental enquiry.

Yours faithfully

Ken Boston

Regional Director of Education Central Highlands - Wimmera Region.

Copies to: Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations Executive Director (schools), Mr J. Nunn.”

I still recall returning home from Horsham and McCraw waiting at my gate, waving the fortnightly Ministry cheque at me and chuckling, “Here’s your pay!”

There was also Jess Batson's farewell celebration at the school - which I wasn't allowed to attend because it was held on school premises.

TWENTY EIGHT - LETTERS, LETTERS, LETTERS

The outcome of the Wednesday morning staff meeting/strike was decisive. Robert, Mark and Ray drafted letters which Julianne then dutiful typed out and Karen photocopied for distribution and signing.

LETTER 1:

Dear Sir.

We the undersigned staff at this school, wish to air our feelings regarding the School Council meeting that was held on Tuesday, November 6, 1984. The manner in which you as chairman, conducted the meeting was appalling. You were obviously and definitely biased towards the case of Dr F. Toben during the discussion of events that occurred prior to, and following the inquiry.

We, along with Dr Toben and Glenn Duncan, were allowed into the meeting as observers. We followed the directions as requested by the Council. However you allowed Dr Toben to make statements after he had answered his questions. The manner in which you allowed Dr Toben to make statements whilst at the same time providing statements of support for Dr Toben was biased. You totally degraded the efforts of other teachers in the school, as did your comment that "This matter reflects on the teachers". The matter does not reflect upon the teachers but upon a particular teacher and a couple of very biased school councillors, including you as chairman, who chose to accept Dr Toben's version without investigating any other version of the situation.

We, as staff members of this school, do not have confidence in your chairmanship or impartiality and request that you stand down. You have shown yourself not to be independent in this matter, and as such are not fit to be chairman.

Yours faithfully

(signed) R. Ferlazzo, A. McCraw, V. Bull, J. Bell, K. Reid, A. Black, J. Stehn.

LETTER 2:

We, the undersigned staff at this school, wish to protest at the manner in which the School Council meeting of Tuesday, November 6 was held. After hearing reports of the meeting we wish to make the following points.

You, as chairman, were biased in the way you conducted the meeting. You allowed Dr Toben to make statements under the guise that Dr Toben was answering questions. You also supported Dr Toben during the meeting. As Chairman you should have been impartial whilst conducting the meeting or you should have stepped aside whilst the matter was being discussed. You, along with some other members of the Council accepted Dr Toben's version of the situation without attempting to obtain some information from others who were involved.

The Chairman's comment that "this matter reflects on the teachers" is incorrect. It reflects on a particular teacher and the comment was insulting to the staff who have spent a great deal of time trying to improve the school.

We, as staff members of this school, no longer have confidence in your chairmanship. You have shown yourself not to be independent and as such should seriously consider your position as School Council President.

We are further disappointed that members of the Council would not stand up and be counted in the support of the Principal and staff. The passive gesture of support that was proffered did not convey confidence in the actions of the Principal and the staff. Throughout the meeting the welfare and education of the students appeared to be of a secondary nature. It was interesting to note that you, as Chairman, whilst indicating concern for the welfare of Dr Toben, and his family, indicated no concern for the students at the school or for the welfare of other staff members and their families.

Yours faithfully

(signed) by the same as before, but now including those teachers on School Council - Weegberg, R. McCraw, Heggie, Cumming, Campbell, Coutts and Ryan.

LETTER 3:

Dear Sir,

At the meeting of School Council on 6.11.84, it was observed that the student representatives were treated as token members of the School Council. They displayed, by their respectful and restrained behaviour, that they are quite capable and mature. The issue in question involved them more than anyone, yet they were given no opportunity to speak. When the Principal asked a question of them, they were not permitted to answer. These students are duly elected by the student body as their representatives on the School Council and have conducted themselves with the utmost discretion throughout the year.

Yours faithfully

(signed) as above, except for primary teacher Jennie Ryan. Also, Audrey McLean did not sign the letters. As she told me later, "I have to live in this town."

LETTER 4:

Not a letter but a telegram was sent to the Director General of Education, Dr Norman Curry.

'We the undersigned staff of Goroke Consolidated School will no longer work with Dr F. Toben. He has tried to sway Goroke School Council members with a distorted story concerning his recent inquiry. We state he has bent the truth and does not give a true and honest account of incidents. We the staff have been more than fair with Dr F. Toben and refuse to sit back any longer and watch him ruin the education of the children at this school, to try to discredit an honest and hard working principal and tear the staff to pieces.'

Signed Heggie, Ryan, Coutts, Campbell, Reid, Weegberg, Bull, Stehn, Black, Cumming, Bell, McCraw, Ferlazzo and McLean.

Again, Audrey McLean informed me that she never signed this telegram, yet her name appears thereon.

Upon receiving a copy of this telegram, Dr Curry added a hand-written note:

'What is happening about Toben? - I understand the girl he called a Lesbian is a niece of an MP - we may well hear more of this.'

LETTER 5

This letter was penned by the two boys on School Council.

'Dear Council

We are writing this letter because we are concerned about the way we are being treated at the council meetings, especially the one held on the 6th November, 1984, concerning Dr Toben. We are very upset that we were treated as if we were visitors and not proper council members When the Principal asked us a question and gave us the chance to speak we were cut off by the Chairman. This happened on several occasions. There were times when we wanted to speak or ask questions but were silenced.

We are now writing so that our statements can be heard.

1. That Mr Toben has visited the homes of students and made a number of telephone calls to our parents using inappropriate language which we think any person should not use at all.

2. Mr Toben has accused our parents of all being together in one plot to get Dr Toben, and told our parents that they are influencing their children against him.

3. He has accused students of being a liar, a shit stirrer, ring leader, labeller, lesbian, Schizophrenic and having sexual problems and many other insulting things.

This list contains only a few examples but we hope that they will be taken notice of. In answer to the principals questions, our English classes have not changed from the change of teachers.

Yours faithfully

(signed) Mark Ross, Bradley Stacey.'

Besides obvious spelling errors, it is quite evident from the above that these semi-literate boys received a helping hand in composing the letter.

Letter 6:

'Dear Ken

Please find enclosed the letters sent by staff and 2 student reps on school council to Edwin Mitchell which deal with the November council meeting. It was this meeting and the support of Dr Toben at that meeting by Mr Mitchell and Kevin Johnson that caused the conflict which erupted the day after. My private speculation is that Kevin Johnson (who was voted off council at the meeting) is trying to make the situation worse Would it be paranoid to assume that F. Toben is also making bullets?

(signed) R.A.McCraw.'

This undated, hand-written letter, and its enclosure, certainly influenced Ken Boston's view of the Toben affair. He was embarrassed for having had such an upheaval in his area. It was not the last upheaval for him. Even in South Australia, while filling a five year contract as Director General of Education, Boston created a stir - and subsequently, as a result of an unfavourable comment by a Supreme Court judge about the mind-set which had removed the Kangaroo Island principal from his

position, Boston terminated his contract early, to take up the Director of Education position in New South Wales, at almost twice the salary.

LETTER 7:

McCraw wrote two letters, one to Betson and one to Curry, (see end Chapter 25), wherein he seeks to ensure that Goroke's staffing situation be secured. He forwarded these letters through Ken Boston. It was a hand-written, undated letter.

'Dear Ken

Please find enclosed a letter from me to Jim Betson. I believe it is self-explanatory. Because I am writing to a superior officer I have tried to be restrained and polite.

I am however extremely disgusted with the way this whole affair has been handled. The two bright points in an incompetent fiasco are

1. The conduct of the enquiry itself what was supportive
2. The help I have received from you personally. (we would still be waiting an enquiry if it wasn't for your help).

There is no way I can escape making the statement that the Central Administration of the Education Department has not fulfilled its responsibilities and supported school staff in the way in which they have a right to be supported.

I cannot stress strongly enough the need to speedily resolve matters such as this. As I said to Jim Betson, schools do not rip themselves apart by taking action such as this, on a whim - it is a well considered action and the needs of the students are kept in mind at all times. Unfortunately, our expectation of support was not met.

My advice to my peers, both Primary and Secondary, will be 'don't initiate any action such as this, let the children continue to suffer until the issue blows up in the Department's face. The personal cost to administration and staff is too great. You will get no support from top' - "You're on your own mate." This is a sad statement to have to make especially since when I joined the Department (24 years ago) the impression given from the centre was one of mutual respect and admiration.

If there is any lesson to be learned from this fiasco we are currently going through, then it is - set specific time constraints within which action must be taken. That way schools in the future will not feel as let down as we currently feel.

My honest opinion is that if I had gone political or industrial from the very beginning the whole matter would now be resolved. I'm sorry to have to 'dump' all this on you but I feel most upset that the staff and students have had to suffer all this for so long and hope perhaps that you can do something to alter the situation through the Regional Director level.

Yours

(signed) Ray McCraw.'

LETTER 8:

Senior Education bureaucrats were monitoring the Goroke situation. Assistant Regional Director of Education and co-author of the enquiry report Jim Clelland wrote, on 6 November - the day after I had been declared in excess - to Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations, Jim Betson.

'Dear Jim

I had a message from R.D.E. (Boston) that you wanted more detail with regard to the enquiry into allegations against Dr Fredrick Toben of Goroke Consolidated School. The situation at Goroke is apparently deteriorating. Any steps that could be taken to resolve the matter quickly would, I am sure, be for the general good of the school and community.

Yours sincerely

(signed) Jim Clelland.'

LETTER 9:

School Council President, Mitchell, also wrote a letter in reply to the various letters he had received from staff and student representatives on School Council. Dated 4 December, 1984, he addressed by name each person who had signed the letters.

'Re your letters requesting my resignation as School Council President following our meeting of 6th November 1984.

Firstly I would like to say that I am offended that you as individual staff members signed such letters. Over the past 20 years I have attended hundreds of meetings and served as president for a large number but never before has my integrity or impartiality ever been questioned.

However, the atmosphere and conduct displayed at our last School Council meeting was the worst of any meeting I have ever attended. This view is also supported by other School Council members who have spoken to me since that meeting. In fact none envied my position as chairman!

At the meeting I was critical of the fact that at no stage had the Principal briefed me on the situation re Fredrick Toben. As staff members, some of you have been closely involved in the matter and because of this close involvement you are not able to view

comments made by others rationally or objectively. Because I was not antagonistic towards F.T., in your opinion I was biased towards him. All questions asked of him required more than a simple yes or no answer. However, when he did digress I called him to order.

The comment I made "that the matter reflects on the school and the teachers" has been taken out of context and distorted by you to give a different meaning to that which was intended. I raised the issue of F.T.'s family by way of repeating the concerns expressed to me by various people who asked me for my assistance as the School Council President to help resolve the problem.

Your criticism of the School Council for not being supportive of the Principal is grossly unfair. School Councillors have told me since that they were not prepared to commit themselves any further on the issue which most of them knew very little about until the night, but all felt that the motion carried was adequate and appropriate.

Finally I will conclude by saying that our system of justice still provides that all men are innocent until proven guilty. I endeavoured to see that this principle was adhered to by the meeting.

Yours faithfully

(signed) Edwin Mitchell.'

LETTER 10:

On Wednesday, 12 December, Dr Ken Boston arrived at Goroke. He was responding to Edwin Mitchell's attempt at gaining some redress from the charges levelled against him by school staff. Mitchell had visited politician Eddie Hann, who in turn sent Mitchell off to Jim Betson. He was furious with McCraw's action of sending Mitchell all those letters. He was also disturbed to learn about McCraw placing Audrey McLean on sports duty for 1985. Boston called a staff meeting, then together with McCraw formulated a letter of apology.

'Dear Edwin

We refer to recent correspondence between the staff of Goroke Consolidated School and you as President of the School Council, and to the harsh words which have been spoken and written by both parties in recent months. The school recently has been through a period of great upheaval associated with a departmental enquiry into a teacher at the school. Such matters inevitably lead to tensions and divisions developing within the school community. In such a climate, it is easy for various parties to state too strongly the different points of view, and to misinterpret the action of others.

There is no doubt that the Council and staff have a shared concern for the future of the school, and that both parties have at all times acted in what they believe to be the best interests of the school.

The departmental enquiry has reported to the Director General of Education. As a result, the teacher who was the subject of the enquiry has been removed form the school. There are therefore no longer any grounds for the tensions and divisions which have built up during the year. We believe that it is now possible for effective working relations between Council and staff to be restored. We offer you our continued support as president of the School Council, in the knowledge that you share with us a strong desire to work constructively for the good of the school.

Yours faithfully'

(signed) by all the regulars with an addition - relieving teacher Monica Sonego also put her signature to a piece of paper which didn't really involve her.

TWENTY NINE - MORE LETTERS

WEDNESDAY, 12 DECEMBER

I was working on an 'overlocker' exercise which John wished me to complete by the weekend. He had some money left over and decided to spend it on these machines. The problem now was to allocate fairly the distribution of these machines throughout schools in his 'lense'.

A mild commotion near the coffee/tea area, next to Jim's and John's office, surprised me. It wasn't yet time for morning tea. I could hear Ken Boston's voice talking to Jim and others. He said something about having to go to a small school, Wombelano or Noradjuha, and that his wife would remain here until his return. Back home that evening Glenn told me of Boston's visit to school.

"Fancy that," I mused, "why would a Regional Director have to invent a story for his listeners at Regional Office?"

"Perhaps he was afraid the whole thing would blow up again," Glenn suggested.

"If he's trying to smooth over troubled waters by telling 'white lies' - well, to me that's still lying."

"Read this," Glenn thrust me a copy of the 12 December letter. "Boston and McCraw wrote this up in Ray's office, then Boston asked everyone to sign the letter."

"And, of course, you didn't have to because you didn't sign those other letters."

Glenn smiled. "Weegberg really got upset about signing the letter of apology to Mitchell. Boston had to use his 'authoritative voice' to placate him and make him sign the letter. Weegberg seemed to fall apart."

FRIDAY, 14 DECEMBER

Before morning tea Boston arrived in my office oozing strength and vitality. "Have you considered your options?" he asked me.

"What do you mean, Ken?" I responded, wondering what he was on about.

"Have you considered resigning from the Department?"

"No," I replied, with my heart beginning to noticeably thump.

"Well," Ken continued in measured, condescending tone. "There are two options open to you. You can resign or you can face dismissal."

"What do you mean, Ken?" I asked, feeling quite helpless in my innocence. "Why should I resign? I haven't done anything wrong."

"Then you'll face dismissal," he added firmly.

"I'll contest the dismissal," I replied.

"I'm sure the Department will do its homework properly. It'll stick."

"I'll then have to take the matter to court," I responded, also becoming a little firmer. "I've done nothing wrong and I'm not an incompetent teacher. You know that, Ken?"

But Boston had already slipped out of the room without responding to my final question.

SUNDAY, 16 DECEMBER

Boston's visit to Goroke worried me badly. More so his words about my facing dismissal if I did not resign. The letter of apology from principal and staff also contained matters that disturbed me. I had to seek clarification and the best way of doing that was by writing a letter.

'Dear Dr Boston

I refer to your letter of 8th November in which you direct me not to visit Goroke Consolidated School at any time during the period of my attachment to the Horsham Office. I have complied with this directive. I would like to inform you that I also handed Mr Nunn all relevant material. Further, I have not discussed matters relating to Goroke Consolidated School with anyone at the office. I also note in your letter that "I have made it clear to you, and to the principal, teachers and council members of Goroke Consolidated School, that your attachment to the Horsham Office in no way prejudges the outcome of the departmental enquiry."

Dr Boston, I find this last statement difficult to reconcile with what the staff wrote to the School Council President by way of a letter of apology for their insulting letter to him. The fourth paragraph reads: "The departmental enquiry has reported to the Director General of Education. As a result, the teacher who was the subject of the enquiry has been removed from the school. There are therefore no longer any grounds for the tensions and divisions which have built up during the year."

This letter is dated - and I believe was written by the principal with your assistance - 12 December 1984.

I would appreciate you commenting on the matter raised by the letter written by staff members to the School Council President.

Sincerely

Fredrick Toben'

Boston didn't reply to this letter but he added some hand-written comments: "no reply sent. Lynn can you find our copy of the DG's letter to Toben, telling him he will not be returning to Goroke?"

* * *

At a public meeting at the Nhill Secondary College on Monday 22 April, 1985, I had an opportunity to talk to Boston. The meeting was considering educational restructuring - more specifically, the amalgamation of schools. During question time my brother and I were standing at the back of the hall and when the invitation for question time came, I raised my voice.

"Fredrick Toben, Dr Boston, dismissed teacher from the Education Department. Dr Boston, the lack of teachers in schools appears to have created a problem, I think we agree with that. Then, it appears that there are three other problems that arise and one principal here, in his newsletter last week, mentioned these three problems, and they are, that

1. There is an increase in disciplinary problems
2. There is a lack of student enthusiasm for learning
3. And there is a lack of teaching quality.

Now, all these three problems:

1. Discipline
2. Lack of qualitative teaching
3. And the enthusiasm lacking in students for learning,

all these three problems I was confronted with at Goroke and I was charged with having created these problems. Don't you think that it's rather strange that someone who is well qualified should be be dismissed, or his services should be dispensed with because he's willing to work in the country?"

By the time I had reached the end of my question, I was shaking. The whole dismissal business again flooded over me with hurt and pain.

Boston replied firmly "I don't wish, Dr Toben, to be drawn into a lengthy discussion on the background to your dismissal but I would state that your dismissal went through the processes established under the Agreement that consisted of two stages. The first stage during which you were offered support by your school community and given written statements of your deficiencies as a teacher. The second stage was when you failed to respond to the first stage for reasons of your own. The statements about your teaching and its deficiencies were given to you in writing. The reasons for your dismissal were given to you in writing. In broad terms it was found you were deficient in some of the areas which you referred to tonight as the qualities of a teacher and for that reason your services were terminated."

On 20th November 1985 I again wrote a letter to Dr Boston.

'Dear Dr Boston

Over the past few weeks I have been attempting to reach you per phone - without success - and thus I am writing you this letter. Some time ago I spoke to Mr G. Robertson, Education Officer, Horsham Office, re my dismissal form the Department. Besides expressing dismay at the whole affair, he agreed to write me a reference detailing our professional association of the TEAC funded Radio project at Goroke during 1983-84.

A few days ago, after our meeting in Ballaarat, I was informed that he would, in order to follow correct procedures, have to clear the matter with you. I am still waiting for the promised reference from Mr Robertson. Dr Boston, I would now like to ask you a few questions and I would appreciate a reply from you at your earliest convenience.

1. Did you block Mr Robertson's intentions, as you did the subject advisor's visit to Goroke during 1984?

2. Why did you instruct me not to visit the secondary schools at Ballaarat towards the end of Term II, 1984? Both Mr John Nunn, SO Horsham, and the Ballaarat-based humanities adviser initiated and supported such a visit. Appointments had already been made with HOD's at the various schools.

3. Was it a mere coincidence that my enquiry was held on Thursday, 11 October, three days after the Principal was himself involved in a much publicised promotional assessment?

4. The taped Goroke Consolidated School Council meeting of November 1984 has the Principal quoting your words re my brother's visit to the school. Do you still insist, as you did when I asked you about this in the presence of Mr Nunn, that you cannot recollect telling Mr McCraw: "I would have also hit him?" How do you explain the discrepancy that exists between your comment and that of the Principal?

5. Why did you not reply to my brother's letter? Mr Jim Betson was courteous enough to respond to it.

6. The staff letter of apology sent to School Council President, Mr Edwin Mitchell, and composed by yourself and the Principal, stated that I was the cause of all the trouble at the school. How do you explain the problems that have arisen during 1985, e.g. the complaint against the Principal man-handling a student? Further, within the last week or so I have heard of great student unrest at the school. I have been informed that some students are quite unruly to certain members of staff. Why is there no Support Group established to assist these teachers with their serious performance problems? Some of the problems that have arisen since my dismissal are very similar to the problems that caused the principal to establish a Support Group for me!

7. In your public statement about my dismissal (copy enclosed) you state that the ultimate decision was made by Dr Curry. During my January 7 1985 visit to Dr Curry's office, I was informed that you, Mr Clelland and Mr Nunn were consulted on my matter. Mr Clelland subsequently informed me that both you and he pressed for my dismissal, while Mr Nunn opted for a transfer to a larger school. Why did you opt for my dismissal - especially after you had become aware of the complexity of the matter, e.g. School Council involvement?

8. Are you aware that the Enquiry Report contains a number of errors? For example, it state that I was teaching Mr Duncan chess - it is just the other way, Mr Duncan was teaching me how to play chess!

9. During the January 7, 1985 interview, Dr Curry said to me: "It is not the situation where there has been a charge laid against you and therefore you wishing to defend yourself on each of those charges. The various points that were included in that letter (13.12.84) were merely to indicate some of the issues which had arisen."

At the Nhill meeting of 22 April, 1985, you outlined the process which led to my dismissal. Do you still maintain that "some of the issues which had arisen" belonged exclusively to me?

10 Are you aware that with the falling secondary numbers at the school, had I been a permanent English teacher, Mrs Val Bull or Mrs Sonego (at present emergency teaching) would have to be declared in excess? My removal from the school must thus be seen in the light of future staffing needs. It had nothing to do with my competence or otherwise because all staff members knew that I was quite happy at Goroke. Could you comment on this point?

I would appreciate you replying to my letter at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely

Fredrick Toben'

Copy to Mr Brain Henderson, VSTA President.

Boston's reply of 25 November 1985 was short and to the point.

'Dear Dr Toben

In reply to your letter of 20 November 1985, I advise that I do not propose to enter into correspondence concerning your dismissal from the Education Department.

Yours faithfully

K.G. Boston

Regional Director of Education Central Highlands Wimmera Region.'

* * *

After writing my letter to Dr Boston, I reviewed the past week. I felt uneasy. There were two days to go before the 1984 school year closed - Monday and Tuesday. It was unusual for a school year to end in the middle of a week.

Since Boston's visit to Regional Office and Goroke, Clelland was definitely avoiding me. I was just helping myself to a cup of coffee when he appeared. As there was no one else about I was surprised how Jim held back - he wasn't his usual self. I had the distinct impression he wished to avoid me, but having entered the coffee area, he could not now just walk away without my noticing this.

"How are you today," Jim asked.

"Lousy, Jim," I replied. "I was hoping you'd ask me the question because I want to tell someone how I feel. I wish I knew what was happening."

I filled my coffee cup, then noticed that Jim had slipped away into his office, the door closed - which was unusual for him. I stood there holding my cup, wondering.

* * *

Jim did not tell me about his 6 November letter to Jim Betson. I did not know that Jim Betson had asked his assistant, Steve Macpherson, for advice. On 27 November, Macpherson advised Betson thus:

'In the light of the supplementary material provided by the enquiry panel (re. Letter of 6 November 1984) I have no hesitation in recommending that Dr Toben be dismissed from the Teaching Service on the grounds of his incompetence as a teacher.

I note that Dr Toben is currently located at the Horsham Sub-Regional Office pending a decision on the enquiry panel recommendation.

(signed) S. Macpherson 27.11.84.'

Jim Betson accepted this advice and two days later he wrote: "Dismissal is recommended."

* * *

THURSDAY, 13 DECEMBER

I did not know that a day after Boston had visited Goroke, the Education Department's legal officer, George Drossinos, formulated the following advice:

'I have perused the file in respect to Toben and have ascertained that he is a temporary teacher. Thus, you are able to exercise the powers contained in section 9 of the Teaching Service Act and especially sub-section 8 of that section which permits you to dismiss or remove any person that may be employed under section 9. I have drafted letters for your signature which are attached herewith.

(signed) George Drossinos. Legal Officer.'

Curry received this advice the following day, noting: “legal officer to keep the file until I see Dr Toben.”

Also on 13 December, Curry wrote me a letter which I was to receive in my post box after Tuesday, 17 December, the final school day of 1984:

‘Dear Dr Toben

I refer to your letter of 3 December concerning my earlier communication that you would not be holding your present appointment at Goroke Consolidated School. The difficulties what have been created in the school give sufficient reason for that decision. I have received the Report of the Enquiry and the recommendation of the Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations and as you will see from the other letter forwarded to you intend to act on these recommendations.

Yours sincerely

(signed) Norman G. Curry, Director-General of Education.”

By the time this letter reached me at home I had already become acquainted with the contents of the other letter Drossinos mentioned in his advice to Curry.

THIRTY - THE NEED FOR FLOWERS

Instead of spending the second last school day in the Horsham office, I left home at 4am and drove to Melbourne, arriving at the top of Spring Street just after eight. From there it was only a left turn into the car park at 2 Treasury Place.

My first stop was the telephone cubicle inside the main entrance from where I called John Nunn in Horsham. I informed him that I was in Melbourne visiting the Director General, and that I would most likely not make it back in time for work. He expressed initial surprise then caught himself again and said he'd see me tomorrow morning.

The old lift to the first floor vibrated as it slowly hoisted me into the inner sanctum of the Education Department. A certain darkness pervaded the corridor, its walls lined with a portrait history of past Director Generals and Ministers for Education.

Four years ago I had sought out Dr Shears in an attempt to obtain leave-without-pay for my Nigerian teaching stint. Two years later I did have the opportunity of talking to Dr Curry about my St Arnaud teaching position. This present visit made it number three - there was to be another final one on 7 January 1985. By that time I had become quite familiar with the old building, and it was in some way sad to see the whole department move its head office into the Rialto Towers. Certainly, though, the view from there is spectacular.

While my thoughts flitted around past events I was jolted back to the present by a tall man with balding head, eyes peering above his glasses "Didn't you get my letter?" he asked in rather high pitched voice.

"No, sir," I responded.

"I sent it off last week. Therein I'm informing you of my intentions to dismiss you. I intend to act on the enquiry's recommendation that you be dismissed." He said it all in such a matter-of-fact tone.

"Why are you dismissing me?" I feebly asked.

Condescendingly he replied: "I don't have to give you a reason. It's all in my letter. If you come back in two hours, I'll have my secretary provide you with a copy of this letter." And Dr Norman Curry, the Director General of Education in Victoria disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared.

My mind began to spin. What to do? How to stop the impending disaster? Get a court injunction? At the time I didn't even know what that was! I drove to the VSTA office, then situated in Elizabeth Street, North Richmond.

"Yes," replied the receptionist, "Russell Wicking is in. Who shall I tell him is waiting for him?"

"Fredrick Toben" I responded.

"I'm sorry," she said after a few moments, "but Russell is in conference right now, and he's out at a school all afternoon, and he doesn't know when he'll be back."

I wondered whether this receptionist ever had qualms. Perhaps she derived some perverse sense of power out of the situation. The visitor wishing to see Wicking was an unwelcomed visitor. She was a guard who protected her master from unwanted intrusions. It's a good feeling to be able to protect someone form undesirable people. I had become a pariah, I had been cast out of the protection racket

run by the union. The VSTA had not even offered me advice about being put into the Education Department's parking lot. Workcare had over 6,000 of them on technical ill-health. When the charges became ridiculous - such as "failing to communicate effectively", "writing a letter without permission", calling someone "a contemptible liar and hypocrite" - then usually the union came to the rescue and advised its members to become sick. Those members who did not wish to be superannuated out, those who wished to clear their name of such ridiculous charges, these honourable teachers were cut loose. The teacher unions would also discard those members who sought legal advice from their solicitors. The unions' claim then became "We cannot continue to be involved with your case anymore. You have refused to accept our help".

Another ploy by the education bureaucracy to discard staff is a classic. A principal doesn't like a particular staff member and he makes a report about that person's health to staffing. Staffing then sends that teacher off to a psychologist who will pronounce that the person is an unsuitable teacher. The crux of the intertwining judgement is simple: the psychologist makes teaching ability judgements rather than psychological assessments, while the principal makes medical pronouncements. By this time the whole process creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, and another good person has been destroyed. The elimination process, which euphemistically is called 'support', has claimed its next victim. And in troubled times, during recessions, the elimination process has a ravenous appetite.

I sped to the Ombudsman's office at 440 Collins Street. There a Mr Seamer reassured me.

"Have you had the hearing yet?" he asked me.

"No, not yet," I said. I didn't even know the date of the hearing.

"Come and see me again after you've had the hearing."

From there I crawled to the Appeals Board. "You're a temporary teacher, are you?" the slim, bearded gentleman asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"Then we can't help you. We deal with officers only."

I somehow made it to William Street where I called in at solicitors Galbally & O'Bryan. "Come back to us after you've been dismissed," a gentleman advised. His secretary had a copy of the letter ready for me. In the lift going down I opened the envelope and read the address to which the letter had been sent:

Dr F Toben
c/- 26 Urquart Street
Horsham 3400

Years later I was to peruse my Ministry of Education personnel file again and to my surprise found a covering letter from Dr Curry, addressed to Jim Clelland, addressed to 26 McLachlan Street, Horsham.

'Dear Mr Clelland

I enclose herewith a letter in duplicate addressed to Dr F Toben who I believe is currently located at the Horsham Subregional Office. Kindly hand to Dr Toben the original letter and endorse on the copy the following:

"I… personally delivered the original of this letter to Dr F Toben at … on the day of …. 1984."

Please return to the endorsed copy to me immediately.

Yours sincerely

Norman G Curry.
Director General of Education.'

This undated letter of instructions bothered me because it was not on my file in August 1985. Thereafter the legal department had my file, especially after the 1987 media exposure. The enquiry document was, likewise, undated!

It appears that the original letter of allegations, dated 13 December 1984, arrived at the Horsham office on 24 December, 1984. It was on Christmas Eve that John Nunn rang my brother at Edenhope, informing me that he had for me a registered letter. By this time, of course, I was already on my planned holiday overseas.

The first paragraph of the letter of allegations stunned me:

'This is to advise you that I intend to exercise my powers under section 9 of the Teaching Service Act 1981 at 10am on Friday 21st December, 1984, and if you wish you may intend (sic) before me on the said date and time at my office at the above address, to place before me any matter you consider relevant in respect to the allegations herein made.'

It was Monday, and I was now asked to attend before the Director General on the Friday. I would be overseas by then. Further, had I not come to Melbourne on this Monday, then I would never have known about the Friday hearing date. Was this just a typical bureaucratic bungle or was it strategic thinking on the legal department's part?

I wasn't to know because the Director General did agree to have the hearing date moved to 7 January 1985, after my return from overseas. Once in the car I looked in detail at the various allegations - eleven in all.

1. Classroom discipline and management

In your classes students are unruly, noisy, abusive to the teacher. You make no attempt to subdue the noise and when you are talking to the class as a whole you raise your voice over the din. You spend much of the class time withdrawn from the class as a whole, preferring to retire to your desk and leaving the others to do as they please.

2. Communication skills

You use language beyond the children's understanding. You have a poor capacity to explain clearly, which results in inattention and poor quality performance from students. You have little rapport with students so that they dispute loudly what you say.

3. Incapacity to relate cordially with students

You make many statements to students which are hurtful, sarcastic and often baseless. Children discuss things with you in a cheeky, disrespectful manner and they make pointless outrageous statements to lead you on during class. Generally a state of conflict exists between yourself and the students.

4. Evaluation

The system of marking used by yourself is inappropriate.

5. Teaching methods

As a result of your inadequacy to interact cordially and productively with students all teaching methods fail. Curriculum selection is inappropriate resulting almost always in classroom chaos.

6. Relationships with members of staff

Your relationship with other staff at Goroke Consolidated School was very poor. You adopted an antagonistic attitude towards the support group which was set up to assist you. any advice offered to you by the support group was totally rejected by you.

Allegations 7 - 11. Are the infamous Weegberg observations commissioned by the principal in his attempt to discredit me further. (See: Chapter 26, p.230 ff.)

There was also a final paragraph. I was to learn from a number of other former teachers who had been given 'the treatment' - permanent and temporary alike - that the format of this letter is standard. This is especially so in the closing paragraph of such letters.

I have no objection to you being accompanied by a 'friend' to the hearing, however, no representation for fee or reward shall be allowed at the hearing of the allegations other than by a representative of your union.

Dated this 13 day of December, 1984.
Norman G. Curry, Director General of Education.

To my surprise all six allegations are almost an exact copy of the allegations formulated by the principal in his formal statement of complaint which in turn is a mere developed version of the 14 February 1983 (sic) letter McCraw sent off to Staffing without giving me the opportunity of sighting it. Then, the allegations of disobedience amazed me because I had not known about their existence until now.

I arrived in Horsham around 5pm, and found Jim Clelland and John Nunn still in the office. "Jim, you recommended that I be dismissed?" I challenged him.

"That's right," he stuttered. "You'll get another job with TAFE. I wouldn't worry too much about it."

"But you stated that I was incompetent!"

"Well, the situation at Goroke proved that." He said, looking down.

I left him standing there, feeling rather disgusted about the whole matter. Weeks later, until his death in July 1985, Jim received numerous visits from my brother and from Kevin Johnson, the former School Council President.

"Well, Kevin," Jim tried to placate an agitated man, "McCraw was inexperienced. Now we'll just have to give him enough rope and he'll hang himself with it. We can't undo what's happened You should have told me about all this other trouble earlier. It's too late now to change anything."

A week later Jim died of a massive hear attack.

* * *

Two years later, on 12 August 1987, Kevin Johnson penned this letter for the Wimmera Mail Times:

'Sir, - I read with interest comments by Mr Brian Mann on the dismissal of teacher Dr Fredrick Toben from Goroke Consolidated School, Mail Times, August 5. It is with regret that I left the Goroke area, partly because of financial difficulties but mainly because of the conflict which blew up at the Goroke school.

I became the first school councillor ever sacked at the school because I went investigating. I believe I was manipulated out of the presidency because the administration would not serve under me. When Mr Edwin Mitchell became president of the school council I made the comment 'different leader but same breeding'. Edwin happens to be my first cousin. Because we had the same views on the Toben affair we were eventually both hiked off the school council.

I believe my children would have problems at Goroke and that is why I sent them to Edenhope the year after the blow up. I also believe that the premature death of assistant regional director of education, Jim Clelland was because of the constant worry of the Toben affair, for I talked at length over the matter with him only days before his death. I challenge the Education Department now over the Goroke Consolidated School affair. I don't fear any recrimination now. Come clean and explain so many events at the school!

I only wish that I had been given essential new evidence now in my possession before the night of my dismissal from our school council. It would have prevented the Toben affair. I led Goroke Consolidated School through the stormy threat of closing, and the troubled times of rebuilding and refurbishing. I know my credibility has been destroyed by this affair, and if I can help Dr Toben to be reinstated I will do everything in my power to do so. Reopen the case, and settle the Toben affair once and for all!

Kevin Johnson, Warrnambool, Former Chairman Goroke Consolidated School Council.

[Mr Johnson lists 15 points demanding explanation. They are deleted from this letter because publication might raise libel and defamation problems - Editor.]

Former Timboon principal, Sid Morgan, told Kevin that McCraw failed to get the deputy principalship at that school after one term as acting deputy because "McCraw is a back-stabbing bastard who can't be trusted, not even with the school newsletter."

My wife also decided to put pen to paper. After a tearful evening, she wrote the following: (17 July 1987)

'Sir - This is an open letter to Dr Ken Boston of the Ministry of Education, Melbourne.

Tears run down my face as I write this letter to remind you that my son and I do exist. I feel like the forgotten one in this whole unjust business of my husband's dismissal from the Victorian teaching service. I have done nothing wrong yet have had to endure so much. I do not have any family of mine in Australia for support. I have had to suddenly become the main breadwinner while watching my husband and son suffer so.

I have remained silent till now because it is painful for me to think about what my life should have been like and so I try to shut it out of my mine. The district school bus operator was kind enough to give my husband a job because he believed that my husband had been badly done by. I am thankful for this because jobs are not easy to find when your curriculum vitae states you were dismissed from your last one.

We remain in this town which reminds us of the heartaches of the past. The one good thing is that most of the people in Goroke are sympathetic towards us. This fact and the knowledge of my husband's teaching competence and genuine concern for education, keeps me going. I don't think we deserve the hell on earth we have lived in the last four years. Is there no compassion in your heart?

Georgina Toben, Church Street Goroke 3412.'

Little did I know that on 24 June 1988 my wife would haul me before the Horsham Magistrates' Court and seek an order excluding me from our family home.

These two letters caused a bit of a stir at the Horsham office and they were promptly sent off to Ballarat, and from there to Melbourne. By this time Dr Boston had joined the Ministry of Education's restructuring team. Upon receipt of copies of these letters he informed Dr Jeffrey Dunstan, then Executive Director (Schools):

'Jeff - these are the Wimmera Mail Times cuttings. As you will see, they are trying to draw together the Toben affair and the likely change in the status of the Horsham office - both apparently evidence of one grand but malevolent design. Some of the material is offensive and provocative e.g. the comment on Jim Clelland's death and the Open Letter to me. However, I strongly recommend that we do not react in any way. A letter responding to the controversy will only serve to open it up again. KGB 21.8.87.'

Dr Dunstan had by this time also received a letter from McCraw, who after leaving Goroke at the end of 1985 was now principal of George Street primary school. Dated 6 August 1987, it arrived at Dunstan's office on 11 August:

'Dear Mr Dunstan, <u>re Dismissal of Dr Fredrick Toben</u>

Following recent media publicity and with the threat of more to come I write to seek your assistance and protection. I believe that as Principal of Goroke Consolidated School and therefore the person required by the Department to implement the Discipline and Discipline Regulations I performed those difficult duties according to the law. I believe I and my family should not now be subjected to a deliberate and carefully orchestrated campaign of vilification and harassment by the individual concerned and the media. Dr Toben and his supporters are basing his case for re-instatement on claims that his dismissal was over a personality conflict and that as a Primary Principal I had no competence to judge a Secondary teacher's ability. By seeking to destroy my reputation and credibility he feels he can build his own.

I believe that unless the Ministry is seen to publicly defend me and its own procedures Principals will be reluctant to take essential difficult and stress-inducing actions to remedy situations which are harmful to individual children and which affect the reputation of our State School system. Personally I feel that I cannot be expected to endure any more of this unreasonable pressure. It is time that the Ministry took it from me. I therefore request:

(i) That you agree to accept and deal with all future enquiries and criticisms from the media.

(ii) That you issue a public statement to the effect that the Ministry supports the actions I was forced to take and that it has confidence in me as a Principal.

(iii) That you include in this statement a clause which makes it crystal clear that all of the relevant procedures to protect the interests of Dr Toben were carried out to the letter and that the Ministry therefore believes that the eventual result was fair and reasonable and that Dr Toben has no cause for complaint.

I believe that I deserve this expression of support from the Ministry. I look forward to your early confirmation that it will be forthcoming.

Yours faithfully,

R.A. McCraw, Principal.'

The Ministry remained silent and did not give McCraw the requested support. It appears that the 24 July letter of support from Peter Martin and Chris Ekinsmyth was not sufficient to dampen he renewed media interest in my case. Dunstan referred the matter back to Boston whose view became official Ministry policy, i.e. silence.

McCraw had asked for help once before. On 26 March 1985, he wrote to Kevin Collins, then Deputy Director of Education.:

'Dear Mr Collins

As the matter of Dr Toben's dismissal, while he was a member of staff at this school, has been discussed at length at School Council and is still being discussed in the community, and as many incorrect statements are being said about this dismissal, I would request that the personnel branch write to the School Council through me explaining why Dr Toben was dismissed, the terms of his dismissal and reiterating that the correct procedures had been followed. One of the contentious points is that Dr Toben has been victimised by me personally and by the staff. If it is possible I would like this matter cleared up by information from the Centre. This information is needed fairly quickly to prevent the situation at this school deteriorating further.

Yours faithfully

Ray A. McCraw, Principal.'

Collins received the letter on 29 March. He passed it on to Personnel Division who received it on 2 April. From there it was sent to Industrial Relations Section where Steve Macpherson initialled it on 3 April. His head, Jim Betson, answered McCraw's letter on 10 April:

'Dear Mr McCraw

I refer to your letter of 26 March, 1985 to the Deputy Director General of Education, Mr Kevin Collins, regarding Dr F Toben, formerly a teacher at Goroke Consolidated School. Mr Collins has requested that I reply on his behalf. I enclose for your information, a copy of the letter sent to Dr Toben. It sets out the reasons for Dr Toben's dismissal and should satisfactorily resolve the situation at the school.

Yours sincerely,

J.B. Betson, Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations.'

McCraw's letter of 26 March was written as a direct response to a very short letter, written by Gordon Mitchell to the Wimmera Mail Time, which appeared in that paper the day before:

'Sir - As vice president of the Centenary of Education Committee at Goroke, planning a back to school at Easter, and as one of the compilers of the book on the centenary of education in Goroke and district schools, I am amazed that our present principal, in his fourth year at Goroke, has not contributed to the book, even though invited to do so. As a grandson of one of the early selectors of this area, and knowing the hardships and sacrifices made by them in establishing school facilities, I am deeply disappointed.

Gordon Mitchell, RMB 2173, Karnak, Goroke.'

When Gordon's letter appeared in the Monday edition of the paper, McCraw - according to Glenn Duncan - blew his top. He blamed Glenn as the person who pushed Gordon into writing the letter. Being so out of touch with the community he could not accept the fact that Glenn didn't know anything about this letter.

After Gordon's letter appeared in the paper, McCraw called at his home. "I want you to withdraw that letter," McCraw said softly.

"But, Ray," Gordon protested, "how can I withdraw the letter when it is the truth? You were invited to contribute an introduction to the Centenary of Education book."

"I gave your brother, Edwin, the School Council President, my reasons for not writing an introduction to the book," Ray trembled.

"You're wrong there, Ray," Gordon continued in his calm way. "I checked with Edwin before I sent the letter to the paper."

"That's wrong," Ray almost shouted. "I've got Julianne Stehn as a witness to our conversation when I gave him the reasons for not writing the introduction."

"You're calling Edwin a liar, then?" Gordon asked.

"I'm saying that I gave him the reasons," McCraw said sounding rather angry.

"Then why don't you tell me what these reasons are?" Gordon again asked Ray a direct question.

"You haven't heard the last of this," Ray angrily snapped, his eyes full of hatred.

"Ray, all I want you to do is to give me the reasons why you refuse to write an introduction to the book," Gordon almost pleaded, but Ray had stormed out of his home and was heading back to Goroke.

Gordon also discovered that someone from the school had rung Perry's of Mount Gambier - from whom the committee had hired the tents for the festive occasion - and cancelled the arrangements. This was discovered only a few days before the celebrations were to begin. It meant that Perry's had to get a replacement tent because the original Goroke tent had already been re-assigned to another town for the Easter weekend.

After the successful celebrations Gordon again penned a letter to the local paper. On 3 May he wrote:

"Sir, - in response to Mrs Hart (*Mail-Times* April 24) and others who have written direct to the Goroke centenary of education committee, I, as vice president of the committee and one of the book compilers, wish to say how refreshing it was to read words of praise. This was so different from some of the verbal criticism I have received from a very small section of the community. I would like Mrs Hart and others to know that at a public meeting, the centenary committee was formed, comprising teachers, school council members and the general public.

How strange it was to see teachers and some council members drop off and no longer participate. The committee was left with four school council members and one teacher. Of this four, one resigned, one was excluded and two were not re-elected at the annual meeting, one being the president. This series of events did not deter the four council members from further centenary involvement. Had it not been for a small, dedicated and determined committee, this successful centenary would not have eventuated. Yes, Mrs Hart, it did take a lot of organising. Without the book committee under the competent leadership of Dr Fredrick Toben and the fine art work by teacher Glenn Duncan, plus the many months of research, this fine book of our early educational history would not have been printed.

Congratulations to retired former teacher, Mr Jack Binder, for his forthright speech at the centenary. The sooner the Education Department heeds his message on the need for basics in education the better. The latest police report on recruits and the high number of rejections because of a lack of these basics is alarming and is a sad reflection on the present system.

Gordon Mitchell, RMB 2173, Karnak, Goroke'

In July 1985 Ray McCraw, through Ken Boston's Ballarat office, sent a letter to the Director General of Education.:

'Dear Dr Curry,

I would like to request permission to apply for a transfer from Goroke Consolidated in less than the regulation 5 year period which is the current appointment minimum. At the end of the year I will have been here for 4 years. I do not request any preference, just the ability to apply for centralised selection appointments in normal competition with other applicants. The reasons for this request are as follows:

1. You will remember that Dr Toben was dismissed from the Department as a result of actions initiated by myself at this school.

2. You will also be aware of the furore that occurred here late last year when a couple of school councillors interfered with the due process as laid down, and of the consequent happenings.

3. You have also seen the letters collected locally by Mr Johnson and presented to you at Dr Toben's last interview with you in January '85.

4. At the beginning of the year everyone was very relieved that the whole matter was resolved - was prepared to forge ahead normally. This is indeed what has happened with the school. It is now back to normal and functioning very happily.

Unfortunately the same cannot be said for me personally or my family. Very briefly this is what has occurred to me/us since the beginning of the year.

a) The first week back John Nunn (SEO) brought out the letters given to you by K. Johnston for me to answer - this was done.

b) Mr Johnston began making statements around the district about how he was having me removed and 'McCraw will get his now' etc. etc. This stimulated a great deal of interest.

c) At Mr Mitchell's insistence I was charged with a traffic offence regarding his daughter (Mr Mitchell was the School Council president and had agreed to Dr Boston in December last year to drop the matter). This charge was dismissed in court and the policeman questioned as to why the charge was laid, by the Stipendary Magistrate.

d) A letter of abuse about me was sent to the school and a sign saying 'McCraw Guilty' hung on the Post Office.

e) Letters to the Mail Times criticising me from a third person supporting Dr Toben which had no factual basis.

f) Publicity in the local paper re Dr Toben's dismissal. At this time much was said locally by the few people supporting Dr Toben but nothing was said by the staff of the school or myself, so that the issue could die.

g) Abusive and annoying phone calls at all hours of the night.

h) Summons on Dr Toben's behalf suing me for defamation.

All these circumstances peaked halfway through term one and both my wife (who teaches at the school) and I had the best half of the term off. Since this term has started the frequency of the annoying phone calls has increased (causing us to now to leave our phone unplugged at night) and rumours etc. have been circulating around the town.

I feel that the situation will improve as most of the community are supportive of the school and myself but the personal pressure put on us by a few will not stop till we leave. It is as a result of these pressures that I must request permission to apply, under time, for a suitable transfer, if one happens to become vacant this year. I remain

Yours faithfully

R.A. McCraw.'

On 23rd November, the *Hamilton Spectator* ran an article headed 'School has say in its new Principal':

'Hamilton George Street Primary School's new principal is among first principals appointed under the Education Departments' new local selection of principals scheme. Mr Ray McCraw will start at the school at the beginning of the new school year next year.

The school council advertised the position in the department's gazette, the six applicants were interviewed by the council, and a priority list was sent to the department. The department appointed Mr McCraw to the position, taking into consideration the list complied by the council. Mr McCraw said he was impressed with the new system introduced this year. "It gives the schools the chance to match their needs with the abilities of the applicant," he said. The old scheme, central appointment, is based on seniority. Mr McCraw has been involved in teaching for 23 years. His last position was at Goroke Consolidated School, which involved classes from prep to year 11.

Mr McCraw said he was looking forward to being back in a straight primary school. He has also taught at Timboon Consolidated School, Lismore Primary School, Manangatang Consolidated School and Mooreland Primary School. He also participated in the International Teachers Fellowship, which took him to Montana, America.

Mr McCraw visited the school this week and said he was looking forward to his move to Hamilton, an attractive area. His wife, Anna, and daughter Kirsten, who is in Grade 5, will move during the summer. "We're intending to make our home in Hamilton for a number of years," he said.

Mr McCraw is interested in computers, and intends to introduce a computer course at the school. The school recently purchased two Apple computers. Mr McCraw said children would be taught the use of computers, rather than programming. "The children will be using the computers during language studies and mathematics," he said. "It will also give them an opportunity to build up their keyboarding skills before moving to secondary school." Mr McCraw said when he finds time, he enjoys playing golf, and was also a keen gardener.'

Thus twice the Centre had helped McCraw, and as a public servant he was, of course, protected against any legal action arising out of an exercise of his duty as a principal.

* * *

I returned from my Christmas holidays in Swaziland in time for the January 1985 formal hearing. For this proposed meeting I prepared a written reply to the 11 allegations.

Ref.: Reply to your letter of 13 December 1984, addressed to me c/- 26 Urquart St Horsham.

Dear Dr Curry
my visit to your office on 17 December resulted in you informing me of your intentions to exercise your power - a copy of your letter was handed to me, addressed not to my Goroke address but to a Horsham street number. In reply to your letter of allegations I would like to state the following:

Allegation 1: Classroom Discipline and Management

The allegation is a misrepresentation of my teaching technique and the facts are distorted. You use the principal's highly exaggerated vocabulary ... no teacher leaves students to do as they please. What nonsense!

Allegation 2: Communication Skills

You are stating that students' inattention and poor quality performance is my fault. This is a simplistic, subjective statement. My students' output was more than that. What a pity you did not see the good quality work that I received. Perhaps the work folders which I had to hand in are still available for perusal. What is more important here is my question which I have asked again and again - especially after I found out that the Principal lied to me about my permanency application in September 1983 - why did the Department not send an English consultant to the school so that my work could be assessed? The Support Group was made up of non-English experts and the Principal's understanding of secondary English is wanting. His slavish adherence and following of some fashionable American trend revealed his ignorance of the subject. For example his Process Writing ideology led to a primary teacher commanding her Year 5 - 6 class to "get on with your process writing".

During the school's in-service on Process Writing, the couple that conducted the course was quite impressed with my students' output, especially the Year 7 book. I cannot understand how you can comment upon my performance; rapport with students means "in close relationship or sympathy with" ... why was my radio activity not mentioned under this point? For two years I worked very closely with both primary and secondary students in fruitful productivity. Don't you wish to know about this activity?

Allegation 3: Incapacity to relate cordially with students

This statement is libellous. These words are taken directly from the Principal's written notes which are absolute distortions of facts; save for the few students that were given the green light by the Principal to "give Toben hell", I had a very good relationship with most students.

Can you explain to me why my year 7 and 8 classes were still functioning quite well up to the day on which the Regional Director took me out of the school? And this despite the obvious orchestrated campaign of hate against me!

My getting along with students has never been questioned elsewhere, except at St Arnaud - but then colleagues there confided in me that what the Principal, Mr Peter Schmidt did to me, was an overreaction to trivia. Mr Rigby said to me: "Even if you did call the girl names, I've got away with worse". At Kings Park High, Stuttgart, Kwe Kwe, etc. , I was always warmly farewelled by the students.

Your apparent attempt at also smearing my reputation has an ulterior motive that I cannot fathom. You base your comments, I believe, on hearsay, and if you are objective in this matter, then you will realise that there is indeed something wrong with the Principal of Goroke School.

Allegation 4: Evaluation

I would appreciate you explaining this statement - why and in what way was my assessment of students' work inappropriate? I would indeed be interested to go through students' work with you, then hear your comments as to why and how my evaluation was inappropriate.

Allegation 5: Teaching Methods

Again your libellous statement worries me. You are again using the Principal's words and I have shown elsewhere that his capacity to distort and exaggerate is evident in all his written reports. My curriculum selection was, fortunately, based on a course that operated in many Victorian secondary schools - and the chaos you talk about, I suggest, is to be found in certain people's minds.

The Principal's slavish following of fashionable trends in education proved problematic because he could not see that such an approach cannot form the basis of a sound general English course which aims to teach basics as well as advanced language skills.

Allegation 6: Relationship with members of staff

The first sentence is incorrect and trivialises human relationships. The 'antagonistic' attitude towards the Support Group was more than an attitude of moral disgust because this group was formed to one purpose only - to fulfil the Principal's command: execute Toben.

My letter of 27 June 1984 refers to the incident where Miss Karen Reid reports on a meeting between the principal and myself, where he says that he's going to inform Staffing to have me removed immediately from the school, if not now then at least by the end of the year. 'If they refuse, then I shall instigate dismissal proceedings against you.' And all I asked him to do was to stop gossiping behind my back, e.g. pub talk, John Bell's dismissal talk at the end of Term II, etc.

Elsewhere I have mentioned the righteousness that flowed through the Support Group's written report, and I also mentioned how amoral this adopted stance was; one particular incident reported by the group indicated how hateful members were towards me - so much so that they began to become irrational in their work, beginning to fabricate incidents and imaging things.

Before replying to the charges of disobedience I would like to make the following relevant comments:

a) I would indeed have been a fool to have shown any form of disobedience at this late stage of the whole affair. After 15 months of viciousness from the Principal I was still not prepared to submit to his amoral and perverse view of education.

b) I maintain that I am not guilty of any crime - that my statement about standards of conduct of certain members of staff still stands; the foul language that some staff slipped into, especially during Term I and Term II 1983, was often painful to my ears. I certainly had a modifying effect upon classroom language as well - and I need not mention that I am also very particular about my own use of language.

c) The Principal's attempt at finding me legally guilty is farcical and contemptible. I am amazed that you fail to notice this. It is too obvious a device to get me charged because up to this point it is obvious that I am being persecuted - for whatever reason.

Allegation 7:

This was Monday, 29 October 1984. The day before, Sunday afternoon, a student had informed me that I would be losing English classes and that the librarian, Mrs Val Bull, would be taking them instead. During my Year 7 library lesson, period 2, I asked the librarian whether she knew anything about this matter. She became evasive and left her library post. At recess time I asked the Principal the same question about the rumour I had heard that Sunday afternoon. He replied that he would like to see me in his office at 11:15 a.m.

Upon my arrival, Mr Mark Weegberg was sitting on a chair, busily writing on a note pad. I asked the Principal whether I could also have a person with me as a witness. He refused, then read the letter of instructions to me - dated 29 October 1984. After reading, he asked me whether I had any comments to make, and because he had presented me with a fait accompli I replied 'no comment' and left the room.

Before taking up my new duties in the library I requested permission to make a phone call - which was granted. I rang the Assistant Regional Director, Mr Jim Cleveland, who informed me to go along with the Principal's wishes and this I did. I concluded that call at 11:45 a.m. Please note that this allegation is thus invalid because no one can make a phone call from the school without the Principal's permission.

Allegation 8:

I informed the Principal that I would have to photocopy the marks because I keep all marks for each form in one book. Further, I was instructed to be in the library. Please note the time sequence: Allegations 7 and 8 are separated by minutes only.

By this time the Principal was visibly agitated, trembling and breathing quite heavily, and Mr Weegberg's fanatical gaze at me revealed hatred towards me. This allegation is thus farcical.

Allegation 9:

This point quotes directly form the Principal's letter. This indicates to me that the matter is not being treated objectively. As indicated earlier, I had spoken to Mrs Bull about this matter and she informed me that there was no hurry for the material, that Friday would be early enough. Please note that students' work was available at the back of the English room; the course work was photocopied because I still required the original for my other classes. I also wrote the Principal a letter in which I informed him that I was seeking advice on all this matter - and that I would assist Mrs Bull in whatever way I could. (I believe that the Principal informed the whole school that the work all the years he did with me was not being taken into consideration for the final end of term mark.)

Hence this allegation is again an attempt at finding me guilty of disobedience, which is absolutely untrue. I am amazed that the Principal didn't report the incident of the key to you - or should I take that as an example of his selective reporting? On Tuesday, 30 October 1984 at 12:20 p.m. the inseparable pair - the Principal and Mr Weegberg - entered the library and, with two Year 5 students present, the former asked me for the school key. I asked why and his reply was: "You have not kept an accurate record of your photocopying." I asked him to specify and he pointed to my letter of help - 29 October 1984 - (I had given him a copy of this letter as well).

I informed him that this letter was copied by my wife at the Health Centre and if he wished to compare the paper, then he would notice that the school copying paper was of a different quality. I demanded an apology from the Principal for this false accusation. I am still waiting for this apology - but it appears that this man can get away with anything - degrading, humiliating, destroying, persecuting me - with apparent tacit support from the Director General, Regional Director and the Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations.

The School Council President, Mr Edwin Mitchell, however, extracted an apology from Principal and staff after they abused him in writing. This incident indicates the true nature of the Principal - and how he still blames me for his personal failing; Dr Boston, it appears, gave the Principal solid moral support on that point. The letter of apology is, however, a farce because it still blames me for their personal failings - such a blatant act of scape-goating is pathetic, especially if it comes from a supposedly educated and enlightened group of people.

Allegation 10:

This request was made at the end of recess while I was photocopying library cards during free lessons and I informed him of my arrangement with Mrs Bull. The librarian also informed me that the photocopying of the cards was a good idea. Later that day the Principal informed me that the librarian was not happy with the task. I conferred with Mrs Bull and she told me that it was the Principal who felt displeased with my work.

Allegation 11:

A) My timetabled duties consisted of returning borrowed books to the shelves. This task was completed.

B) I did not leave the school early. On this day I expected my brother at the school around 3 p.m. As I was travelling to Ballarat after school, to attend the AGM of the MACE chapter, I was asked by my brother to see a firm in Beaufort for him. I did not know until 3:25 p.m. that the Principal had threatened my brother with the police, if he had waited for me in the school foyer. I bade the principal a good afternoon just as the bell was being rung - 3:32 p.m. = 2 minutes late.

I share bus duty with Miss Karen Reid - and we take it in turn with that duty. When I informed her that I was about to take off as quickly as possible after school, she agreed to do the duty for me, reminding me though, that she also wished to leave early for Horsham.

There is thus no reason for any allegation of the nature made by the Principal - and I take this allegation 11 as a sign of a desperate attempt to legally bind me to laws that could get me dismissed on grounds of disobedience or insubordination, neither of which I am guilty.

(signed) Fredrick Toben.

Writing this letter exhausted me. I had to look up diary and workbook entries so that my claims were factually substantiated, unlike the Principal's purposeful fabrications. This kind of situation again proved that truth telling has its own rewards. One need not expend limited energy on covering one's tracks. Nor does one need a detailed memory - something so essential for chronic liars.
I wrote the final draft of this reply to the 11 allegations on 6 January, 1985, a day before the formal hearing in the Director General's office. Time had run out for me to prepare much else.

My quick whip-around for supporters to come along to the hearing was fruitful. My brother would, of course, not miss meeting the big boss. Nor would Kevin Johnson and School Council elder, John Crabtree. Glenn Duncan was to meet us outside Treasury Place. He, too, wished to meet the man in charge of Victoria's $2.5 billion enterprise.

We all arrived before 9 a.m., the appointed time, and witnessed a farmers' protest march outside the agricultural ministry. We sat in the reception area for some time, playing through our verbal intentions. Suddenly the office door opened and a tall figure appeared before us - I had met this man before so I immediately rose and walked over to him. "Dr Curry," I said, "may I bring some gentlemen along …"

"No, no, no," he interrupted in a fading high pitched voice. "You may, if you wish, at various times ask for one of these people to come in and give any evidence which you might wish them to give, and you may have one person with you throughout the whole time, but I certainly would not agree to all of these people …"

Dr Curry's voice faded into mumblings, and I asked John Crabtree to be the first to accompany me into, as was shown later, the den of iniquity. In his rather spacious office, Dr Curry introduced us to Mr Ken Dear, of the Department's legal advisers. He was a young, frail, bearded man who looked anxiously at us, and he seemed apprehensive and unsure of himself.

"Well, Dr Toben," the Director General began, "I have indicated to you after receiving the report of the enquiry, which recommended that your services to dispensed with, that I intend acting but before doing so, to give you the opportunity to make any comments that you may wish to make."

I told Curry that I would not have received the letter of allegations in time for any hearing had I not collected the copy from him personally. I handed him my letter of reply to the 11 allegations.

"Well," he began, "it is not my intention to go through each individual allegation with you. It is not the situation where there has been a charge laid against you, and therefore of you wishing to defend yourself on each of those charges. The various points that we included in that letter were merely to

indicate some of the issues which had arisen, and I now invite you to make any comments which you might wish to make, but in general the purpose of this is to enable you to give any indications why I should not proceed to dispense with your services."

"That is in the letter because I refute the allegations point by point. I go so far …:"

"I stress again," he continued in raised voice, "it is not a question of refuting the allegations point by point. I have recommendation from a properly constituted enquiry that took place after support procedures had been established in the school. It was a properly constituted enquiry which has recommended your dismissal not on the basis of specific, what you call allegations, but it is my intention to act upon the recommendation."

"O.K., Dr Curry," I responded trying to get him to listen to me. "The support group, you make the point in your letter. You say that I adopted an antagonistic attitude towards the support group which was set up to assist me, that any advice offered to me by the support group I totally rejected. I rejected the advice because the support group came out, particularly with one incident which indicated that it was not a support group but it merely legalised or it merely supported what the principal wished to do in any case. The fabrication of an incident, an outright misrepresentation of what occurred - I feel is not a support group and therefore I rejected it. It was not assistance. I have asked for assistance from qualified English teachers and not other teachers …"
"I was about to say, Dr Toben," Curry broke in without responding to my claim. "The Support Group was established according to the agreement which was made between the teaching unions to deal with a disciplinary situation. The support group was intended to provide whatever support was needed for you to rehabilitate your position."

"But the support group …" I felt blocked by Curry's line of reasoning. "The way the principal declared I had a problem, which I denied, is difficult to combat. The support group revealed that there was indeed, if I may state it quite strongly, a kind of conspiracy."

Curry sprang to life. "Dr Toben, are you saying there was a conspiracy on the part of the total staff of the school …?"

"I would almost go so far because …"

"What about previous schools where problems had arisen?" Curry asked almost victoriously.

"I think I wrote that in my letter to you, where I said that upon my arrival at Goroke I informed the principal of the problems I had had at St Arnaud. He talked to me about the problems he'd had at other schools - that older students initially frightened him."

"I'm not talking about earlier …"

"Dr Curry," I interrupted, "if I may. Two years at Goroke, my teaching competence has been questioned, my ability to handle children has been questioned. It is an exaggeration - these quotes from the principal, and his final attempt at getting me legally in points 1 to 11 is farcical because I did not and I never have been disobedient. This is where the fabrication comes in and I absolutely attack the principal on his dishonesty because all these points I refute in my letter. There's no question of my being insubordinate or attempting to break the law - and this is what is happening. It is an absolute smear campaign against my person."

"By the total staff of the school?" Curry smirked.

“Not the total staff, Dr Curry,” I responded. “If you are aware of staff dynamics, and this is where the other gentlemen come in … I have references. I don’t know whether you would like to have a look at them.”

“The references are irrelevant,” he responded. “That’s not the point of issue. The point of issue is what happened during your time at Goroke, the carrying through of the agreed procedures as far as the discipline arrangements were concerned. But,” he again sounded triumphant, “there is legally no reason why they should need to operate as far as a temporary teacher is concerned. However, the enquiry was held and the panel of two submitted an official report which recommended that your services be dispensed with.”

“What is the reason?” I asked, without knowing that Steve Macpherson and Jim Betson had been the officers who advised Curry to dismiss me.

“Because of the sorts of things that were set out in my letter to you.” Curry, of course didn’t tell me that George Drossinos of the legal department had drafted the letter of allegations for him.

“And I deny these allegation,” I stressed, feeling annoyed that I just couldn’t get Curry to open himself to a discussion of those allegations in detail. “This is where I say that in all my teaching career I have not had this kind of business happening before …”

“I think I should proceed to ask the people,” Curry interrupted.

“I beg you,” I said, “just one other point about my work. It says that I cannot work with students. Now, I have brought along a book which I produced with the Year 7’s for a whole term, and this is where I clashed with the principal on what is creative writing, the writing process. You may think it is trivial but I would like to specify because it is important. The principal doubted my competence in teaching English. I can prove that I am competent. The Year 7 book indicates what I was actually doing with my class. It indicated to me that I can work with juniors. My radio activity also proves that I can work co-operatively right across the range from primary to secondary. I deny that I cannot deal with students.”

“Well, Dr Toben, I return to the point. Mr Clelland and Mr Wicking conducted a thorough enquiry and the result of the enquiry recommended that your services be dispensed with. Now, I am prepared to listen to any evidence which you wish to introduce from other people.”

“Yes. I will then have to point out that the official complaints written up by the principal …”

“I am not concerned with any official complaint written up by the principal,” Curry sounded exasperated. “I am concerned at the result of a full enquiry established by this department which had investigated the situation and recommended that your serviced be dispensed with.”

“Then I can say in one day they cannot fathom what I have suffered over 15 months after the principal lied to me, after he started …”

“Dr Toben!” Curry spoke to me as if I was a naughty school boy. “I will not listen to any more. If you wish to introduce evidence from people you have brought with you …”

“You’re brushing me off,” I feebly replied.

* * *

Dr Curry did not respond to my point about a one-day enquiry grasping the situation. But our local member of parliament, Bill McGrath, did. On 13 February 1987 he formulated a letter to the Legal Aid Commission:

'Dear Secretary,

I write to support an application for legal aid from Mr Fredrick Toben, of Goroke, who is claiming unfair dismissal from the Education Department. I am sure you are familiar with the documents in his case and the arguments put forward by his solicitors. The aspects I particularly wish to support, as Dr Toben's parliamentary representative, are

* his right to a review of actions in dismissing him because of the severity of the action and its consequent effect on his working life, career, and personal life
* the doubt raised by the solicitors on the validity of a one-day hearing in which terms of reference were changed

Other points of concern include the comment that status could be related to granting of legal aid, and that a full course of action might be closed to Mr Toben because of the requirements after the act of dismissal.

My lay understanding of other statements and comments by solicitors is that there are legal challenges and possibilities yet to have been explored for Dr Toben. In a matter as serious as this dismissal, I would hope that every chance of review has been offered to him.

If you wish to discuss aid for Mr Toben, I would be willing to talk to you about his case.

Yours faithfully,

Bill McGrath, Member for Lowan.'

* * *

"This is John Crabtree, former Goroke School Council member," I said, and Curry merely looked impatiently at John - who got the message and immediately launched into his story.

"I wasn't aware of anything going on, not until that advisory council meeting when it was brought to our notice. And the advisory council was subjected to a meeting that nobody got any sleep that night."

"Could you go a little bit slower, Mr Crabtree, I'm trying to take notes," Curry almost pleaded.

"I was unaware, as I said, of Dr Toben as he is called and I did not know why he was called Doctor, because till that night he was called Mr Toben. It was brought to the advisory council's notice that this affair had blown up and I tried to ask questions to the principal and the principal's second in command or second in charge of secondary school. I tried to ask questions because we were ignorant of what was happening and it was very heated. I asked the principal why it was that staffing problems be brought to the advisory council. He insisted that all other matters be dropped while we handled this situation of Dr Toben first. Now most of us at the advisory council were completely ignorant of anything. He demanded that we dispense with the issues of what was creating the division in the school staff. I was aware that some of the advisory council knew and some were ignorant like I was."

"Well, presumably it was staff on council," Curry offered as an explanation.

"It was suggested that serious allegations had been made against him and that he should be present to answer for them. Mr McCraw, the principal, asked about four or five staff to be present."

"Apart from people on council?" Curry asked.

"Yeah," John continued, "they were to be present to verify, to support the principal and his allegations against Toben. I have never witnessed such a meeting in my life," John sounded angry, reliving every moment of that meeting in Curry's office. "I was staggered at what was going on and I made the first comment which the principal tried to apologise for. I said that is the most un-Christian way of talking to a man I have ever seen from a school teacher and I will not stand for it."

"What sort of thing did you take offence to?"

“Well, here was this man asking questions and Toben went to answer them. He said ‘Yes, I agree with that but,’ and then Mark Weegberg jumped out of his seat and yelled very loudly ‘You are not allowed to make statements, Dr Toben. You are not allowed to make a statement because you are a visitor at this juncture.”

“Who was the person?” Curry asked.

“Mark Weegberg is the assistant, yeah, the second man; and that, you know, absolutely staggered me - the way he viciously attacked this man. I said I want to hear the truth of why he’s got such allegations against him. It was a bitter and long drawn out meeting and he wasn’t allowed to say anything but yes or no, and he was talked down to and shouted at by particularly Mark Weegberg and one of the students who was a representative on the advisory council. A student accused Mr Toben of things and you know, I was sitting there like this and the student was in front of me and he had addressed Mr Toben sitting next to the principal in the most un-Christian manner that I have ever seen a child allowed to speak. He was red in the face and absolutely hostile towards Mr Toben and that particular family has been friendly with our family all their lives - 50 years - and I was staggered at this young boy about 14 or 15, and I said so.”

“What did he say?” Curry asked interestedly.

“That I had called a girl a lesbian?” I interjected.

“Well,” Curry sighed with relief. “Was the student upset because he felt Dr Toben should not have called the girl a lesbian or what?”

“But I did not!” I protested.

“It has been proven that he did not,” John added.

“Proven by whom?” Curry asked sceptically.

“The people concerned. I asked questions.” John replied.

“Do you want to comment on that Dr Toben?” Curry asked.

I related the incident in detail and sensed that Curry had an odd interest in the incident.

“What I am asking you is has it been proven that you did not call her a lesbian?”

“But has it been proven that I called her a lesbian? It hasn’t been proven and it is a child’s allegation against a teacher, Dr Curry. A child’s allegation and it appears that you, by the letter you have written …”

“I came down here,” John interjected, “not to say what sort of a teacher Mr Toben was because I was ignorant of the fact but I do know that Miss McLean, who has taught at the school and taught my six children, is now going through exactly the same persecution and she’s a gifted teacher.”

“So you have no personal knowledge through your children of what sort of teacher Dr Toben is?” Curry sounded relieved and dismissive.

“No,”

“When you say the same sort of persecution …?” Curry continued to probe.
“It was obvious from the enquiry in the town which I have known from one end to the other - a radius of about 50 miles - I’ve been from one side of the community to the other. I know everybody personally and I ask questions and Miss McLean, as I said, is going through the same persecution. It is known by the parents of Mr Toben’s students that he was deliberately set up to be eliminated from Goroke.”

“Is there any reason why?” Curry asked disinterestedly.

“Yes.”

“Why was he set up to be eliminated?” Curry probed again.

“Because of the very nature of our principal.”

“So you are saying that Mr McCraw is able to get the whole of the staff of the school to join in a persecution campaign against …”

“Are you saying am I suggesting or am I saying that this happened?” John interrupted.

“Well?” Curry asked.

“I am saying it is definitely happening,” John concluded triumphantly.

“McCraw is able to influence the whole staff?” Curry feigned ignorance.

“Absolutely.” John was still prepared to pursue this line of reasoning but Dr Curry had heard enough, and he asked for my next witness. It was to be Kevin Johnson, the former Goroke School Council President who had lots to tell the Director General about Whiskers’ doings at the school.

“McCraw’s caused nothing but trouble at this school,” Kevin spoke fearlessly. “My kids have Mr Toben for English and they like him. They’re learning something in his classes. I’ve visited his classes and I saw what I liked. He’s good. But it’s McCraw who’s been nothing but trouble since he came to Goroke.”

“Could you give me an example of what you are talking about?” Curry asked.

“Yes. I’ve got these letters of complaint from people who’ve worked at the school as cleaners and gardeners. This is Mark Carracher’s letter,” Kevin said handing Curry his first prized possession. Curry read silently:

‘In reference to the job as groundsman at the Goroke School. I started the job when Mr Rogers was headmaster, and he was pleased with my work. Then Mr McCraw came as headmaster and I could never do anything right. He was on my back all the time, till it came to a head and he had me sacked.’

“Yes, Mr Johnson,” Curry responded dismissively.

“Here’s a letter from Joan Chaston, domestic arts maid.”

‘I have been an employee at Goroke Consolidated School for the past 16 years. To me Mr McCraw has been the most unpredictable principal I have ever worked for. He takes too much into his own hands without discussion for example changing time tables.’

As Curry looked up Kevin handed him a note from Ruth Burns.

'I feel that while I was employed at the Goroke Consolidated School as a cleaner, I was unjustly harassed by the school principal. This behaviour on occasions caused me to go to my other place of work in the position of receptionist at the Goroke Community Health Centre, in tears. I feel that the manipulating behaviour extended to me partly caused me to resign as cleaner from the Goroke Consolidated School. If I can be of further assistance, please contact me.'

"Yes," Curry said, "anything else?"

Kevin handed him Mrs Blythman's letter.

'We are parents of 10 children, all of whom have attended the Goroke Consolidated School, six of whom are still attending. Over the 10 years our children have attended the school, we have had no trouble until Mr Ray McCraw came here as Principal. We seem to be treated as second class citizens because we're a large family and aren't wealthy. We are not the only family that has noticed his attitude of one rule for the wealthy and one for the poor. One mother has already taken her children out of Goroke school and sent them to Edenhope school because of this prejudiced attitude.

Mr McCraw can't seem to understand or believe we have money worries and won't make any allowances for our situation and has accused us of playing games with him and trying to put one over him. Because of his attitude towards others in our position our children are suffering by being embarrassed in class. We have considered taking our six children our of this school and send them to another. But as we live directly over the road from this school and the next nearest will involve a very long bus trip for the children, we decided to see if anything can be done about McCraw's attitude.

We have always taught our children to respect their elders and teachers but it's very difficult when a Principal like McCraw comes along. We couldn't afford to buy the material for our 13 year old son to do sewing in sewing class and also go on Year 8 camp for a week. Our son went around town doing odd jobs to earn the money to go away on the camp. Mr McCraw wouldn't let him go on the camp because he wasn't attending the whole curriculum (sewing class). He said the money earned should go to sewing class. We pointed out that that was our responsibility, not our son's. He was attending the sewing class of Mrs McCraw, but on arrival at her class, she would send him to her husband. Mr McCraw would then give him yard duty.

When my husband went to see Mr McCraw about the unfairness of his treatment of our son, he brought up our finances and made mention of having seen our children eating an icy pole at the pool, and implied things weren't as bad as we made out. My husband pointed out that our teenage daughter not living at home had shouted the younger children the icy pole, but Mr McCraw didn't want to know. My husband and I couldn't believe he had to explain why our children had an icy pole on such a hot day.

After talking to Mr McCraw for two hours our son was still not allowed to go to the camp, despite the fact that our son had earned the money himself so that he could go. This is just one incident to give an example of Mr McCraw's petty attitude. I could give so many more. This attitude is doing so much harm to our children. We can't explain to them why they and other children from low income families are treated so differently to the children of wealthy families. Mr McCraw's attitude is wrong and it's doing so much harm to the whole school. There has been so much trouble at this school this past year, which only served to harm the children's education Hopefully something can be done about it before the children start school this year, 1985.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Hedly Blythman.'

* * *

Mrs Blythman had addressed her letter to Dr Curry, but she was never to receive a reply from him. In February 1988 she wrote to the Ministry of Education, seeking a response. Mr Kevin Collins, Chief General Manager, responded on 18 March 1988:

'Dear Mrs Blythman

I refer to your letter of 8 February 1988 in which you have made allegations about 'victimisation' of your children by past Principal of Goroke Consolidated School, Mr Ray McCraw. You have also indicated that a letter sent at the time to Dr Norman Curry, Director-General of Education, was neither acknowledged nor answered.

I note that there is no date on the copy of the letter sent to Dr Curry, although it appears from the final sentence to have been written at the beginning of 1985. You say that Dr Curry told you that he had handed the letter on to Dr Ken Boston, then Regional Director in the Central Highlands-Wimmera Region, but there is no record of the letter on the appropriate file, even though there are many others dealing with problems at the school at that time, all of them with Department responses.

As it is normal practice for this Ministry to both acknowledge and respond to such letters I can only apologise if this did not occur in your case. However, as the alleged incidents occurred approximately three years ago and as Mr McCraw is no longer at Goroke or even in the Central Highlands-Wimmera Region I do not think there is much to be gained by pursuing the mater further.

Yours sincerely,

M.K. Collins, Chief General Manager.'

Some weeks later, Mrs Blythman's husband received a substantial Workcare payout. There were also certain parental improprieties levelled against him. She then separated from him and left the district.

Three months after Kevin Collins wrote his letter, my wife contacted solicitor Euan Thompson of Horsham, and initiated separation-divorce proceedings against me. Thompson also handled the Blythman family break-up. In 1982 Thompson was the treasurer of the Horsham branch of the Australian Labor Party which opposed the National Part candidate, Bill McGrath.

* * *

McCraw's reply to Mrs Blythman's letter, in correspondence with Ken Boston, read as follows:

'Most points were covered in my reply via John Nunn - only one point was missed: their child, Glenn, was not allowed to go on the camp because of his bad behaviour during school and because he had run away from school during class time. This was explained to the child at the time and to the father that evening during the two-hour discussion at tea time. As you can imagine many exchanges between people occur in two hours and the comment I made about icy poles did not relate to their personal finances as they applied to school.

Re the comment on my persecuting low income families - this fact may answer that charge - when I arrived here in 1982, one family in the district was receiving a Maintenance Allowance - there are now seven families receiving help and four families are being helped by State School Relief (I helped the Blythman's apply for maintenance allowance but the Department knocked them back). I hope these comments as well as the comments I made via John Nunn will help close the issue.'

* * *

"Yes," Dr Curry mused to himself. "Yes, Mr Johnson. Is there anything else you wish to tell me?"

"This is the final letter of complaint against McCraw. It's from the groundsman, Mr John Hodge."

Dated 4 January 1985, John Hodge had addressed his letter to Dr Curry and he had sent a copy of it to the Goroke School Council President, Mr Ron Hawkins.

'I wish to comment on the manner in which the tender for the groundsman contract has been handled at Goroke Consolidated School. Owing to increased workload, by reason of extra lawns, etc., I felt an increase of five hours a week was in order for the 1985 year. Having been groundsman for the past two years, having applied for the position when first put up for tender, having been told by the principal that the school could not afford more than $4,200 at that time, I applied for the year. The following year I asked for a $1,000 increase. This was put to the committee and approved. It has not been put to tender for two years. I expected that my request for five hours work be put to the committee. I do not know whether this was done or not.

I was informed by the principal that the position would be advertised. This I thought was odd after being informed that the work I had performed met with the satisfaction of all concerned.

I tendered for the position and I believe the committee voted that I should have the extra time. The time advertised for had been the exact time I had asked for. On the vote at school council, I believe it was voted again that I was given the job, provided that the budget allowed for it. (Who made up the budget, one may ask.)

The outcome was that the other applicant was given the job because budget did not have the money allocated for the amount required to cover my tender. This I accepted, but when I found that the other applicant was the husband of a teacher at the school, who at the time resided at Nhill, and now it seems that as Dr Toben is leaving Goroke, there is now a house vacant, so a move from Nhill is under way. To me this all seems very strange and appears to me at least to have been manipulated from the start especially as the successful tender was less than half the going rate. I have in the past 18 months prior to the opening for the new school building put in considerably more time than contracted for, in October and November 84 above, having worked more than 85 hours extra time. This was known to the Principal. I must say in conclusion, that at the very least, the whole thing appears as shabby treatment.

Yours truly, John Hodge.

* * *

McCraw responded via Ken Boston to Hodges's letter thus:

'1. Tenders for Groundsman's job were advertised for during October. Tenders were called for because the amount of work had been increased - a decision of council at October meeting.
2. When tenders arrived they were given unopened to School Secretary, Mrs Stehn who held them unopened till the day of the council meeting when they were given to the Council Secretary.
3. Proposed budgets were worked out in October - by me. (Administration, grounds and Buildings). Staff had no knowledge of these. The amount of income left was allocated to subject programs in conjunction with staff, later. Mrs Cumming (Council Secretary and Staff member) had no knowledge of Ground budget figures at this stage.
4. Mrs Cumming left the council meeting during the discussion on gardening contract.
5. The proposed Ground budget figure was given to council during the meeting and discussed. It was pointed out that this figure could be varied but that money would have to be taken from somewhere, if it was increased.
6. Because of the difference in the tender ($1,300) the council decided to accept the lower tender. See copy of minutes.

7. At no stage this year was any person given any financial information of any sort before tender closed with relation to the grounds. The full conventions and regulations pertaining to tenders were observed at all times by myself, the staff and the School Council."

McCraw's explanation of 2 July 1985 was more an afterthought to the verbal response he offered to John Nunn. On 9 January 1985, Dr Curry had written to Dr Boston. "I enclose copies of letters which I was given by Mr Johnson during submissions made to me by Dr F Toben. I believe that the matters raised, especially in the letters by Mr Hodge and Mrs Blythman, may need receiving any comments you might wish to provide."

On 22 January, Boston wrote to John Nunn.

'I refer to the enclosed letter from the D-G and the three photocopies of letters. I would be grateful if you would prepare a comment for me on the three letters, following a discussion about them with Ray McCraw. The essential purpose is to gain his side of the story - do not consult with Dr Toben, any of the writers of the letter, or any other third party.

This is not a major issue, but as allegations against the Principal have been made it is important that his view of the situation also be made known by me to the Director General."

John Nunn sprang into action and after some extensive consultation with the principal, Nunn wrote **"Goroke Principal's Explanation":**

'Letter - John Hodge

In 1983 all applicants for the initial tender for groundsman were told by the principal, after Council discussed that the job would take about 15 hours per week, that the School Council was thinking of a figure around about $4000. All tenders were given the same information.

The original tender advertisement stated, and the contract stated, that the tender was for one year and could be extended for two years by mutual agreement of the school council and the groundsmen. This was done. A copy of the contract is appended. The groundsman Mr Hodge was the successful tender and worked for one year. He then requested an increase in payment which was granted by the school council. The increase was for $1000.

At the end of 1984 the School Council decided to call tenders again. This decision was recorded in the School Council minutes. The School Council and the Principal were happy with Mr Hodge's work and told him so. The position went to tender again because of the conditions of the contract as stated above. In relation to the tender for 1985 two tenders were received at the school by the Principal. Both tenders were given to the school secretary, unopened, and she placed them in the school safe. On the evening of the school council meeting these two tenders (unopened) were given to the Secretary of the School Council by the Principal. They were opened by the Secretary of the School Council just prior to the commencement of the meeting. In the General Business segment of the meeting the tenders were discussed. Mr Hodge's tender was approximately $1,000 above the budget figure of $5,000. The budget had been prepared by the Principal and the Financial Committee of the School Council wanted to give the tender to Mr Hodge, ways were explored by which the budget could be raised to allow for the $1000 difference (The second tender was $500 below the budget figure.) The wife of the lower tender who is the Secretary of the School Council was excluded from the meeting to allow frank discussion (at no stage was information about the budget given to any tender.) When it was realised that the school programs would have to be cut to pay the extra $1000, on the motion of the School Councillor, it was passed by a large majority that the tender be given to the lower tenderer. The Principal, Mr McCraw seconded a motion expressing appreciation at Mr Hodge's services.

The successful tender had been the School Council gardener at Nhill school (Secondary section) and had successfully carried out duties there. He has since been awarded the tender for the garden at the Nhill school for 1985. In his tender for the Goroke position he stated that if he was awarded the contract he and his wife would move to Goroke. This information was available to the School Council. The Government Employees Housing Authority allocated a house to Mrs Cumming, the wife of the successful tender. Mrs Cumming is a teacher at the Goroke Consolidated School. There was correspondence between the Principal and the Director General about the house in late November. All decisions relating to the Groundsman position were made by the School Council.'

John Nunn had seen a copy of the School Council minutes on this matter. Under "Building/Grounds" the following appeared:

'Job tender to be discussed - 2 applicants (P. Cumming left the meeting) 1) John Hodge $6900 2) Peter Cumming $5600.

Following discussion, B. Burns moved that the subcommittee investigate the capabilities of both tenderisers and report back to the next meeting with recommendations, seconded by K. Johnson.

R. Hawkins moved an amendment to the motion that the decision be left until the next meeting, pending the finalisation of budgets and that both tenderers be informed of the reasons for the delay, seconded C. Stehn.

M. Weegberg moved an amendment to the motion that the lowest present tenderer be accepted as submitted, seconded by C. Coutts. In favour 13, Against 10. The amendment then became the motion, that the lowest tender be accepted. In favour 12, Against 11.'

Letter from Ruth Burns

Ruth Burns was a cleaner at the Goroke Consolidated School before she was married in 1982. She commenced cleaning around May 1982. During the following 12 months the Principal had cause to speak to Mrs Burns about falsifying the time she wrote in the time book. She arrived late for work on many occasions and left early after the Principal had gone home. She was reprimanded by the Principal for this. Mrs Burns subsequently wrote to the School Council complaining about the matter. The matter was discussed by the School Council and both the President and Secretary discussed the matter with Mrs Burns. It was indicated to Mrs Burns that she should work to regulations and the Principal was the Council's agent in seeing that she did so. Within three months of this incident Mrs Burns was married and accepted a full time job as receptionist at the Goroke Community Health Centre, and resigned her position as a cleaner

at the Goroke Consolidated School. She gave as her reason for resignation, pressure of work. During the last three months of her employment as a cleaner at the Goroke Consolidated School the relationship between Principal and Mrs Burns was strained but polite.

Letter from Mr Mark Carracher

Mark Carracher was the groundsman at Goroke Consolidated School when Mr McCraw arrived as Principal. Mr Carracher's work had been unsatisfactory. The previous principal, Mr Rogers, had stated this to Mr McCraw. Mr Carracher's work continued to be unsatisfactory. His employment was terminated by the Council because the wages cost was too high. This is recorded in the Council Minutes. At this stage the School Council called tenders for the position of gardener (late 1982) during all of 1982 the Principal states he made strenuous efforts to help Mr Carracher who was 18 years old. Mr Carracher has been unemployed since late 1982.

Letter from Joan Chaston.

In 1982 Mrs Chaston worked 12 hours per week as a Domestic Arts Maid. Very little interaction occurred between Mrs Chaston and the Principal. During 1983 a more experienced teacher was appointed to teach Domestic Arts. Mrs Chaston's hours were increased to 15 hours per week in 1983, working according to regulations - i.e. to be present when classes were in session. Prior to 1983 Mrs Chaston had set her own hours of work and even sent her daughter to work in her place.

Mrs Chaston objected to changing her timetable as she had just opened a shop and the times allocated at the school were inconvenient to her. The Principal at the request of the Cookery Teacher instructed Mrs Chaston to work the correct hours and to carry out all of her maid's duties herself. After discussion the timetable was modified slightly to make allowance for Mrs Chaston's business commitments. Once again at the request of the Cookery Teacher the Principal defined the Domestic Maid's Duties and pointed out to her where the Cookery Teacher felt Mrs Chaston's work was deficient.

In 1984 timetable changes at the school necessitated a change in the domestic art maid's timetable. This was discussed with the Cookery Teacher and Mrs Chaston and it appeared that a harmonious agreement had been reached. At all times the Principal had helped Mrs Chaston with worries about her pay, worker's compensation, leave, long service leave and believes he has behaved in a caring way but has expected all duties to be done properly.

Letter from Mrs Hedley Blythman

The Blythmans are a poor family and every assistance has been extended to them by the Principal and staff of the school. In 1982 and 1983 books were issued to the Blythman children which were not paid for. The Principal and staff have arranged jobs for the children to enable them to earn pocket money e.g. car washing, gardening etc. The Principal employed two Blythman children during the 1982/83 Christmas vacation. The parents had given undertakings to pay for the books issued but failed to do so. One request only for payment was sent to the parents by mail. When this was ignored the matter was dropped. At no stage has the family circumstances been thrown up at the children. Three of the boys have been troublesome students (discipline concerns) being also involved in vandalism. Such matters have always been dealt with quietly and far more latitude has been extended to these children because of the family circumstances. One daughter is currently employed as a cleaner at the school on the principal's recommendation. The son was barred from going to the school camp because of bad behaviour and bad language at school. This was after repeated warnings. This was explained to the father. The decision to not allow the child to attend the camp was taken by the principal in conjunction with the staff. This decision was taken only after the child's behaviour had deteriorated very much and with the knowledge that the child had been raising money with staff help to enable him to attend the camp. It was felt that the risks were too great to take him on camp. Mrs Blythman has been abusive to the principal in the playground in front of the children because her eldest son was threatened with being banned from using the school but which takes him to Horsham High School, because of his bad behaviour on that bus. This threat was given in conjunction with the Horsham High School Principal's agreement as he controls one of the two buses he travels on.

Goroke has a large proportion of poorer working class people as the wealthier parents tend to send their children away to school. The program at the school, discipline methods and organisation of the school reflects the principal's and staff concern for these children. In reference to the son's involvement in sewing classes the following points were made. The son had stated openly that he wouldn't do sewing. When he refused, with his parents backing not to pay for materials, he was provided with alternative activities and free materials by the sewing teacher. He was still disruptive so he was removed by himself. On one occasion he was sent to the Principal for bad language. He was suspended from sewing classes for two weeks and given English activities. He was returned to class when he agreed to behave himself and to continue with his work. At the end of the half year he went to Woodwork classes where his parents paid for the materials. His brother went to sewing classes and because he wanted to sew his parents paid for his materials. The young daughter took part in cooking classes and all materials were paid for by staff members when the parents said they couldn't pay.

Summary

As a general comment in relation to the letters received by the Director General; the Principal made the following comments:

The fact that these letters were organised by Mr Johnson is significant. In 1984 he was not renominated as President of the School Council by any of the thirty council members present. This was extremely embarrassing to him and he stated publicly that the principal was the cause of it, ignoring the fact that 30 council members were present. He did not attend subsequent council meetings until the issue of Dr Toben came to a head in November 1984. At that meeting a casual vacancy was declared by the Council against his position due to his non-attendance. This was passed by a full Council and comments of censure with regard to his actions were made by Council.

Subsequently Mr Johnson has stated publicly that he would have Mr McCraw removed from the school. He has since sent all his children to Edenhope High and Consolidated Schools. Mr Johnson has found all the people in the community who in the normal course of events came into conflict with the school and persuaded them to voice their discontent. It has been reported to the Principal by other members of the community and staff that Mr Johnson has interviewed them to try and get further statements of discontent. That they have refused to do so, the Principal believes, shows that he is not incompetent, difficult to get on with or a tyrant as appears the case from reading these letters. There are 90 families in the school and in the three years he has been principal about 40 employees have been at the school.

Mr McCraw is concerned as to his standing with the Education Department as a result of these allegations as contained in the letters from the 5 writers. He feels his integrity has been severely damaged and wishes to know his standing and how his ability is regarded by the Education Department. This matter is of extreme importance to Mr McCraw who believes that his professional integrity and standing has a question mark against it. This concern needs to be addressed.'

So ended the report of Senior Education Officer, Mr John Nunn, as to what transpired during his discussion of the letters' contents with the principal, Ray McCraw. He sent off the material to Boston who, in turn wrote to McCraw on 21 May 1985:

'PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL
Dear Ray

I enclose a précis of letters taken to the Director General by Dr Toben in January, together with a summary of your comments prepared by John Nunn. The letters are in typed form because we hold only poor quality photocopies of originals which are still at Head Office. As well as being barely legible, the letters are very rambling; for both reasons, it has been easier to work from typed copies which were prepared from dictation. However apart from deletion of the formal opening and closing remarks they have not been edited.

The summary of your comments also has been typed. The Director General has asked me to provide him with further comment "in due course," particularly on the Hodge and Blythman letters. I have done so verbally but not yet in writing, as there are some issues in the explanation which require further elaboration. I have not bothered to raise these with you before because both of us had more pressing issues on our minds and your handling of the affairs mentioned in the letters has not been in question. However, to finally close the file, I need to give the Director General a written statement, which I would hope will be brief and concise.

I forward copies of the letters on the understanding that you will use them only for the purpose of preparing some further comments by way of explanation. Specifically I request:

a. that you do not reveal to any other person the fact that the letters are in your possession;

b. that you do not reveal the contents to anyone; and

c. that you do not contact the writers of the letters to take issue with any of them. (Were such action to be necessary, we would proceed formally and through the proper channels.)

I think the most pressing issue is that raised in the Hodge letter. (see parallel comments.) The whole letter amounts to a criticism of the council rather than of the principal. I would appreciate your comments on this, and also on any other aspect of the explanation which you think could usefully be clarified.

Yours sincerely

Ken Boston, Regional Director of Education, Central Highlands-Wimmera Region.'

* * *

"Yes, Mr Johnson," Dr Curry asked after reading through the Hodge letter, "Is there anything else you wish to discuss with me that may be relevant in this matter?" Without giving Kevin a chance to respond, Dr Curry rose from his chair. "In that case I'm prepared to listen to your next witness, Dr Toben."

Kevin walked from the office in disgust. What else could he have said? "He's not listening to me," Kevin blustered as he walked towards the other men sitting on the chairs outside the Director General's office. "He's just not responding to anything."

Glenn Duncan was very nervous as he entered the inner sanctum, and Curry sensed this. He withdrew from any serious questioning and let Glenn just talk. But Glenn had very little to say, except that the Principal had been prejudiced against us.

"Ray McCraw is a dishonest principal," Glenn said. "He's lied to us and he's deceived us. He's been very dishonest with us, and not until the enquiry did staff turn against Fredrick."

"Is there anything else you wish to say?" Curry asked softly.

"No," Glenn responded, too disgusted with Curry's response. He thought telling him about the principal's dishonesty would carry some weight with Dr Curry. Glenn walked out of that office feeling dejected and disillusioned with the whole Victorian education system.

* * *

In Legal Officer Dear's summary of the comments made by Glenn Duncan at this hearing the following is stated:

'Glenn Duncan, teacher at the school felt that Dr Toben was being manipulated by the Principal and staff. Had little to offer other than Dr Toben requested to leave a staff meeting and when Dr Boston attended was put on yard duty. He stated that until the enquiry the staff was generally in favour of Dr Toben i.e. no conspiracy.'

This comment is odd. Firstly Boston was not at the school when staff met on Wednesday, 7 November, when I looked after the students at the school. Boston arrived the day after. Then, Dear's apparent relief that there was no conspiracy contradicts McCraw's contention that the staff were against me!

My brother was next in line to petition Dr Curry on my behalf. Dr Curry gave a brief overview of the procedure which had led to my being declared incompetent, and to the enquiry having made the dismissal recommendation.

"The formal enquiry reports to the Director of Personnel and then makes recommendations to me. He has recommended that Dr Toben's services be dispensed with and I have indicated to Dr Toben before I finally decided that I would allow him to present any material that he may wish to do and he has answered that by you and a number of other people attending. I now invite you to make any comments which you might like to."

"I gather you have objectively listened to the other people and you have not just carried on the way you have now. I hope not. I have…" Tony began.

"I beg your pardon. Would you please repeat what you've just said," Curry sounded like a wounded dog.

"I said I hoped that you have listened to the points put forward by all the other people concerned, and then I hope that you will listen to that," Tony repeated innocently.

"That's not what you said," Curry gasped.

"What did I say?" Tony asked.

"You said you hoped that I had listened objectively to what was being said and not just carrying on."

"O.K. You're not just carrying on."

"I take strong objections to that statement," Curry admonished Tony.

"I take it back then and I apologise," Tony meant what he said.

"I'm sorry, I'm not prepared to accept what I see as a grossly impertinent statement."

"My integrity has been at stake throughout this affair. Fredrick's integrity is at stake. Everybody's integrity is at stake. But that's irrelevant, isn't it?" Tony strongly asserted. "Dr Boston has not yet answered my letter."

"Well," the Director General said in calmer tone, "are you saying in relation to Dr Toben's teaching in the school there is any argument that I should not proceed to accept the recommendation that has been given to me?"

"Yes," Tony continued forcefully, "I feel it is a frame-up by McCraw."

"Could you please explain how that frame-up includes people from outside the school?"

"I spoke to Jim Clelland in Horsham," Tony continued. "We spoke for a long time and he said that McCraw was a very inexperienced principal and that McCraw was learning at my brother's expense."

The conversation turned to Dr Boston. “I certainly know Dr Boston recommended dismissal,” Curry said calmly. “I have spoken to him about this matter.”

“Why has Dr Boston not answered my letter to him?” Tony asked. “Common courtesy would have elicited a response. He doesn’t have any common courtesy.”

My brother’s words again snapped Curry out of a disinterested slumber. Tony had offered him another reason to feel indignant.

“I am not prepared, Dr Toben, to continue to listen to you if you make disparaging remarks about senior officers of this department.”

“I’m sorry, sir,” Tony responded firmly. “It is not making disparaging remarks at all. It is the truth. If I write a letter of complaint to a government official, then I can at least expect an acknowledgement from the officer.”

“I’ve certainly responded to all your brother’s letters,” Dr Curry responded defensively.

And so it continued with Dr Curry selecting his responses to my brother’s raised concerns in such a way that nothing emerged from such a response.

“Sir,” I said in final desperation. “You are listening to the students, you are listening to everyone except me and my supporters.”

“I have listened to you, sir, for the last two hours,” he responded in renewed vigour.

“And the way you are saying this indicates to me that you are getting very tired of this talk.”

“I’m certainly getting rather exasperated at the moment. Your brother wishes to tell me why I should not accept recommendations.”

“Sir,” I said, deciding to illustrate a point, “I was told that when Dr Shears had to vacate this office to you, both of you squabbled over a chair.”

“That’s not true. That’s not true!” Dr Curry exclaimed, wishing he’d not heard me say this.

“Now, that is gossip,” I said triumphantly, “which is either damaging or otherwise. That is my point and I’m glad that you said that it is not true because this is exactly what I was going to point out happens if there is a man at the school who does not indulge in gossip. And if there is another man at the school who does, who lies and who fabricates stories - and this in a small country town, in a small community - it can be devastating and fatal for the upright person.”

“I’d like you to think about this,” my brother added.

“I can assure you, sir, that I have thought about it. And I am rather concerned about the insinuation that you have made more than once that I have not dealt with the matter.”
“Excuse me,” Tony said exhaustedly, “ I said I hope you will see it through because, Dr Curry, I am my brother’s brother. My personal integrity has also been damaged.”

The conversation had come to an end and the listener, Dr Curry, had signalled that he had heard enough from my supporters.

* * *

The report by the Legal Officer, Dear, on this interview makes interesting reading, and reveals more about Dear's personality than about the content of the meeting.

'Dr Toben's brother was aggressive and attacked Dr Curry's integrity on entering the room. He was thoroughly objectionable to the point I expected physical violence to occur. Also talked of the Principal being manipulative. None of the witnesses, nor Dr Toben, could answer the reason why outside independent members of the enquiry came to the conclusion that Dr Toben should be dismissed. Dr Toben refused on a number of occasions to answer stating "I don't want to answer that."

Dr Toben was given every opportunity to provide concrete evidence as to why he should not be dismissed. On many occasions he had to be told that either the evidence he presented was not relevant or material and to stop interrupting witnesses.'

It was this written record which almost sunk my legal action in the county court. Counsel who drew up my action against the Ministry discovered that this written account of the meeting in Curry's office had, indeed, given me 'natural justice'. This is what the Ministry had claimed in its defence. All this happened six weeks before 9 December, 1988, the day on which the case had been set down for hearing in court.

What saved the case from falling apart was a four year-old tape recording of this meeting. Curry's first words indicated that he never intended to give me a hearing on the allegations, as the 13 December 1984 letter of allegations stated. As Judge Strong said, Curry 'shifted ground', and that's a euphemism for lying. Without the tape my word against the Legal Officer's would have counted for nothing. My brother's perception of Dr Curry's attitude at the hearing was very perceptive.

* * *

As we left the Director General's office, we all sensed that my dismissal decision had already been filed, that Dr Curry was merely going through the motions of giving me a hearing because this would fulfil the requirements of natural justice.

Upon my return home, I formulated a letter to Dr Curry:

"I thank you for having given me the opportunity of presenting to you further information concerning my case. I appreciate the problematic nature of your final decision. However, as I so inadequately attempted to indicate to you, my professional and personal integrity has been questioned through this whole affair.

I accepted the forced transfer to Regional Office, just as I submitted to my withdrawal from the classroom. However, I cannot accept another transfer - especially out of the region. My case is not only common knowledge in the Goroke area but it has now spread well beyond this community.

Hence, because this whole affair is a most unjust one, I must insist upon a complete exoneration by you because the Principal's allegations against my professional and personal competence are libellous and untrue. The support group has been discredited and the fact-finding mission of the properly constituted enquiry has, as a number of community members are concerned, been proven to be inadequate.

I illustrated to you the power of gossip and hearsay by mentioning to you the alleged dispute between your predecessor, Dr Shears, and yourself over a chair in the Director General's office. Your protestation "That is absolutely untrue" was wholeheartedly accepted by me - because I know what it is like to be in the firing line of gossip and hearsay. In a small community such as Goroke, a person's integrity can be destroyed by vicious and evil gossip. Your continuous reference to my problems at St Arnaud reminds me of my problems at Kings Park High School. But there a subsequent staffing problem, that forced a member of staff to seek a compassionate transfer (and suicide in 1987 - and the principal's removal from the school at the beginning of 1990) pales my problems into insignificance. Is that why you did not mention my problems at Kings Park?

Your comment "but the whole staff at Goroke is against you" can be juxtaposed to Ken Boston's successful attempt at having all staff sign the letter of apology to School Council President, Edwin Mitchell. Dr Boston's pressure was similar to that used by McCraw to bully reluctant staff to support him. In fact, not all staff supported the principal. It upset McCraw that some people actually doubted his motives for wanting to remove me from the school. It was that power which brought "the whole staff" against me. The Goroke Consolidated School staff had no option, no choice. The major factor operating here for most of them was a concern for their livelihood, the essence of a system that relies on subtle blackmail for its cohesion. Need I say more?'

I posted this letter on 8 January, 1985. Three days later I rode my bike to the post office. I collected a number of letters. There was another with the distinct blue Director General of Education imprint. I

rode home, purposefully. I felt sick. I rushed to the toilet. After vomiting I opened the letter. I unfolded two sheets., and glanced at the final sentence on page 2.

"Well, my dear Dr Curry," I muttered to myself. "You have presented me with a wonderful New Year's present. You've dismissed me on grounds of proven incompetence."

The letter was dated 9 January 1985:

'Dear Dr Toben

I refer to my previous letter in which I indicated that I had received a recommendation as a result of the formal enquiry which had been held that your services should be dispensed with. I have now considered the submission you have placed before me, as well as the submission made by your brother, Mr Crabtree, Mr Johnson and Mr Duncan. You will be aware that the provisions as set out in the three union agreement were followed and that after a support group provided for you had not been able to improve the situation a formal enquiry was held. This was conducted by two people from outside the school and recommended that your services be dispensed with.

Since interviewing you I have discussed the matter further with Mr J Clelland, Mr J Nunn and Dr K Boston. I have also considered reports provided by the Deputy Principal of Kings Park High School and the Principal of St Arnaud High School. I note in those reports the following statements:

"Personality clashes did occur, and Dr Toben did not easily accept reminders that he was open to the same rules as other member of staff."

"Dr Toben left the school without official notice at the end of Term 2."

"His competency in the classroom was lacking; his working relationship with students, staff and parents left a lot to be desired."

If the difficulties in your relationship with other staff and students had been restricted to Goroke I would have been prepared to reconsider the recommendation that had been made, but the same difficulties have arisen in your previous appointments.

It was necessary for me to write to you in September 1982 indicating that the Principal at St Arnaud had reported a number of incidents and saying "You will recognise that I am expecting you to change your approach."

My main concern must be with the welfare of students in our schools and I believe it would not be in the interests of those students for you to continue to be employed as a teacher in our schools.

Your services are therefore dispensed with from February 4, 1985.

Yours sincerely,

Norman G Curry, Director General of Education.

* * *

On 12 November, 1985, Dr Norman Curry was removed from his post. He became the President of the Library Council of Victoria, a position which Sir John Stark had held on a part-time basis. I felt that because Dr Curry had not even bothered to look at my Year 7 book during the formal hearing, I would send it to him. I was surprised by the response:

'3 December 1985

Dear Dr Toben

Thank you for sending me the copy of the story by Year 7 students of Goroke which I have read with interest and appreciation. I am returning this to you. I am sure the students gained a great deal from their involvement in this project.

I regret that you are facing such difficulties and I hope and pray that you will, with the support of your family, be able to overcome them.

Yours sincerely

Norman G Curry.'

I also wrote a letter to Russell Wicking, dated 16 January 1985:

'Dear Russell

I have been informed by the Director General of Education that you supported Mr J Clelland's recommendation of having my teaching services "dispensed with". As my representative on the enquiry, I cannot quite understand that you actually made such recommendation and that is why I would like you to comment on the above.

Further, would you also give me the contents of our telephone conversation, sometime in December 1984 (and it appears that you are not available at the office whenever I call you) in which you said something about my not having the numbers. You became agitated when I drew the Benalla parallel; I said that my case is in reverse to what happened at Benalla where a group of teachers caused a Principal's early retirement, whereas I had a principal (together with his authority) pushing against me.

I would appreciate a comment from you.

Sincerely

Fredrick Toben'

Russell replied on 18 January 1985:

'Dear Dr Toben

Thank you for your letter dated the 16th January, 1985. In answer to your request for me to comment on the points you raised in that letter, I make the following comments:

1) Mr J Clelland and myself did not make any such recommendation, "that your teaching services be dispensed with." Our brief as we explained was to determine the accuracy of the facts as presented to us and make a recommendation to the Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations (Mr Jim Betson) that he either proceed or not proceed, and this is what we did.

2) I was not your representative on the enquiry, I was a representative of your organisation, the VSTA and my role was to make sure that all the agreed procedures were followed, this is what I did and I explained my role to you at length prior to the enquiry taking place.

3) The conversation (in December) that you refer to in your letter I believe was quite long and the Benalla situation was used by you (or I interpreted it in this way) as a veiled threat against my impartial involvement in the enquiry situation.

I trust that these comments answer your queries.

Yours sincerely

Russell Wicking, Assistant Secretary, VSTA.'

* * *

In August 1985, under the new Freedom of Information Act, I received a vetted copy of the enquiry report. It made interesting reading. The undated report came in two parts. The first report of two pages stated at the end:

RECOMMENDATION

That further action be taken by the D.P.I.R.

So far the report had followed the Three Union Agreement. But then the panel of enquiry offered gratuitous advice.

ADVICE

The panel believes these are the options available for consideration. They are in priority order.

1. TERMINATION

The panel believes that Dr Toben's problems arise from his personality and that there will be always problems which cannot be resolved. It may be possible to change Dr Toben's personality in the long term but it is felt that the Department does not have the resources to do this.

2. TRANSFER TO NON TEACHING ADMINISTRATIVE TYPE POSITION

It is felt that this would only delay the inevitable i.e. option 1.

3. TRANSFER TO A LARGER CITY SCHOOL

It is believed that this will also only hide the existing problems for a short time i.e. until Dr Toben becomes known by members of the school community."

Both Russell Wicking and Jim Clelland signed the two pages.

In the further six pages, also undated, more detail is offered. For example: "The aim of the enquiry panel was not to ascertain whether each incident had, in fact, occurred, but whether broadly the allegations were true that Dr Toben is indeed an inept, incompetent teacher, despised by staff and students alike and whether he is an innocent victim of circumstances or whether there are aspects of his personality and professional approach which have brought about this situation."

The panel then details what each person stated to the panel. At the end there is another matter.

"COMMENT AND RECOMMENDATION

At the end of the enquiry, the panel was left overwhelmingly convinced that Dr Toben is an incompetent, inept, teacher. He is either heedless or ignorant of contemporary educational philosophy and his personality is such that he is unable to establish cordial, productive, working relationships with colleagues. He provokes poor reaction from students and is apparently incapable of interacting with them profitably. He is, in many ways, an eccentric, a disruptive element on a shool staff and would be so wherever he went.

It was regretted that the Principal did not inform Dr Toben immediately when he decided to withdraw his support for the permanency application. It was also regrettable that the matter of Dr Toben's incompetence was aired at School Council meetings. The panel found that these matters contributed to the general deterioration of the situation but neither of these factors impinged on the basic problem, that Dr Toben is an incompetent and ineffective teacher. Therefore the panel recommended that Dr Toben should be:

a) dismissed from the Teaching Service, or
b) transferred to a non teaching administrative position, or
c) transferred to a large city post primary school,
with a strong preference to a).

Signed: Russell Wicking, VSTA, Jim Clelland, Education Department."

* * *

I was now totally confused. Dr Curry had only canvassed the dismissal recommendation at the formal hearing. Why? That's the question Judge Strong asked him, too. And Curry's reply? "Toben could have suggested transfer or non-teaching duties. Any teacher would know the other options."

Curry's words, just like the Interrogatories of November 1988, highlighted the corruption surrounding this whole affair. "The plaintiff was informed of the substance of the allegations made against him, and that at the enquiry and during his attendance upon Dr Curry, the Plaintiff was provided with the opportunity to respond to those allegations and in fact did so."

There were to be further public statements about the now infamous formal hearing:

24 April 1985, Minister for Education, Ian Cathie in a personal letter to me:

"I understand that even though the Act does not require it, you were given the opportunity to present whatever information or evidence you wished in a long hearing before the Director General."

24 December 1986, Chief Executive, Ministry of Education, Dr Graham Allan:

"In your particular case the Director General also agreed to discuss the findings of the enquiry panel with you, after it had recommended that your services be terminated. His judgement was that there were no extenuating circumstances to justify setting aside the recommendation."

7 January 1987, Frank Peck, A/Human Resources:

"Your dismissal was the result of the appropriate procedures in accordance with the Teachers Federation of Victoria Agreement on Discipline and Dismissal Procedures. As these procedures were carried out correctly, the Ministry has no further comment on the matter."

30 June 1987, Steve Macpherson, Assistant Manager, Western Region to Bulletin:

"... it's not a fair world ... Toben was not the worst teacher in the system and there are hundreds who are the same ... Toben may have been unlucky."
(from the man who recommended my dismissal!)

19 June 1985, Victorian Ombudsman, Norman Geschke:

"I have continually made the point that it seems to me that you were given ample opportunity to state your case, including your assertions in relation to the above matters, to a properly constituted enquiry and to the Director General of Education. If you were unable to convince them that your case was correct or if you declined to utilise that opportunity, I do not feel that you have provided any sound reason why I should now intervene."

26 June 1987, VSTA Assistant Secretary, Peter Ford to HSV-7 News:

"It's not for me to comment on whether he was guilty or innocent. It is for me to assess that his rights as a person charge with offences were followed and we're very satisfied that those rights were indeed followed."

4 September 1987, Ministry of Education, Frank Peck to the Governor of Victoria:

"Where a performance of a teacher is believed to be less than satisfactory, or where a formal complaint is laid, these procedures are scrupulously followed ... only in the event of gross incompetence or serious breaches of the Act, does the Chief Executive invoke the relevant provision of the Teaching Service Act, as is the case of Dr Toben."

20 March 1989, Ministry of Education Chief Executive, Ann Morrow:

"In the hearing before Judge Strong your competence as a teacher was not addressed and the Judge made no finding on the issue of your competence. However, His Honour did state that on the allegations of incompetence you were given a 'sufficient hearing'. In his judgement Judge Strong makes no order that the ministry of Education should continue to employ you. At p.4 of the Further Reasons for Judgement His Honour stated: 'I find that the plaintiff's employment came to an end on 17 December, 1985, one year after the date on which he received exhibit K, the Director General's letter of 13 December, 1984'."

23 May 1989, A/Chief General Manager, Jeffrey Dunstan to Senator Jim Short:

"The allegations of disobedience arose after the Enquiry but prior to the final hearing before the Director General. The Director General decided to hear the allegations of disobedience in conjunction with the allegations of incompetence."

24 April 1989, Secretary to Governor of Victoria quoting from Ministry advice:

"Dr Toben's competence as a teacher was not addressed in the court proceedings. The Judge made no finding on Dr Toben's competence. As Dr Toben was found through agreed procedures to be incompetent as a teacher, the Ministry does not propose to re-employ him."

27 October 1989 - General Manager, PIROB, Frank Peck, on behalf of A/Chief General Manager, Jim Betson.

"The Ministry of Education made a response to you on the same matter in February 1986. That response has not changed. The response was that the Ministry of Education would not be prepared to consider an application from you until two conditions were met.

1. That a period of at least two years had elapsed since the time of your dismissal, and

2. That you were able, at the time, to provide evidence of satisfactory teaching experience during the period since the time of your dismissal. The satisfactory teaching experience would ideally be an ongoing position, but if this were not possible, experience as an emergency teacher would suffice. Although the first condition has now lapsed it is not the intention of the Ministry to consider employing you in either an ongoing or emergency position until the second condition has been met."

11 July 1990, Chief General Manager, Peter Hill:

"The court findings do not alter the fact that a properly constituted Enquiry Panel found the allegations of incompetence against you to be substantiated. Indeed, Judge Strong in the County Court concluded that you had received a fair hearing on the allegations of incompetence. In view of this, the Ministry is not prepared to offer you employment as a teacher in either a temporary capacity or as an emergency teacher until such a time as you can provide evidence of your competence as a teacher.

I want to make it clear that evidence of satisfactory teaching experience must be gained outside the Victorian State School system. There is no obligation on the part of the Ministry to provide you with the opportunity to obtain satisfactory teaching experience."

17 July 1990, Chief General Manager, Peter Hill to Ombudsman:

"Dr Toben has not demonstrated that the findings of the Enquiry Panel are no longer valid thus there is no obligation on the part of the Ministry to provide him with the opportunity to obtain satisfactory teaching experience. Any reasonable employer, having made a judgement, could not re-employ that person unless satisfied that the person was competent.
I would add further that the Ministry's prime obligation as an educator is to provide students in the State school system with competent teachers. It would be remiss of this Ministry to employ a person found to be incompetent by a properly constituted Enquiry Panel."

April 1990, R. Seamer, Ombudsman officer, to me personally:

"Judge Strong did the legal profession a great disservice by finding in your favour."

10 February 1989, VSTA Assistant Secretary, Peter Ford to *Mail-Times*, Horsham:

"I wish to state categorically that the County Court judgement enables him to resume any teaching position in the state. As well, we'll be supporting him as best we can. I hope he can get a teaching position very quickly."

26 February 1989, Ford to *Sunday Press*:

"Dr Toben has publicly criticised the Ministry, teaching philosophies, even the union. I don't think the Ministry will ever re-hire him ... I think they'll always find excuses."

19 April 1990, Internal Memo: Glenn McBurney to Garth Lampe - GM, RMD after Full Court Appeal 10.3.90:

" ... this section states that temporary teachers may be employed for a maximum of one year, which may be renewed for another period up to one year. Our practice, on the other hand, is to offer ongoing employment to temporary teachers, seemingly without reference to Section 9(4). In these legal proceedings the statute provisions took precedence over our actual practice, otherwise Dr Toben may have been re-instated as a teacher. On balance it would seem appropriate to either (i) amend the Act to reflect our current practice or (ii) change our practice to accord with the legislative provisions for temporary teachers."

* * *

When Ministers of the Crown make public statements which are not correct then it is said they have 'misled' parliament. It is unparliamentary to say a Minister has told a lie. When Ministers make an 'honest mistake', then it is said that they have been 'trapped' by their advisers.

One such example is the following from Steve Macpherson, A/Group Manager, Employee Relations, who advised Solange Shapiro, Ministerial Adviser:

"15.12.87

Dr G.F. Toben was transferred as a temporary teacher to Goroke Consolidated School on 1st February 1983. His application for permanency was initially supported in June 1983 by the Principal Mr R.A. McCraw, but this support was withdrawn in August 1983 as a result of Dr Toben's deteriorating teaching practice.

On 2nd July, 1984 Mr McCraw informed Dr Toben, in writing, of his concerns regarding classroom discipline and management, communication skills, relationships with students, student evaluation techniques and teaching methods. Dr Toben was invited to meet with him to respond to these concerns. Mr McCraw provided Dr Toben with the Agreement which outlines discipline procedures.

On 6th July, 1984 Support Group was initiated and met during July and August. The Support Group decision was made to 'discontinue the support role, as there have been no significant changes in Dr Toben's observable teaching techniques, skills, or relationships with children or staff. This decision was unanimous.' "... Dr Toben has rejected the advice and support role of the group."

A formal statement of complaint was lodged by Mr McCraw against Dr Toben on 9th August, 1984 and requested that the Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations implement discipline procedures as per Section 3.2.5 of the Agreement.

The Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations, Mr Jim Betson, contacted J Clelland, A.R.D.E., Central Highlands-Wimmera Region regarding procedures on 28th September, 1987 (sic) and informed him that an official enquiry would be held on 11th October, 1987 (sic) into allegations regarding Dr Toben's conduct The panel found that the majority of facts supported that Dr Toben was incompetent in all of the following areas:

classroom discipline and management;
communication skills;
relationships with students and other staff;
evaluation of students;
teaching methods;

The panel also found that Dr Toben distorted the truth on numerous occasions. The panel recommended that the Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations take further actions.

On 8th November, 1984 Dr Ken Boston, Regional Director, Central Highlands-Wimmera Region, wrote to Dr Toben and directed him to report for duty at Horsham Education Office pending a decision on the Report of the Enquiry.

On 26th November, 1984, Dr Curry, Director General, informed Dr Toben that he would not be re-appointed to Goroke Consolidated School.

On 9th January, 1985 Dr Curry informed Dr Toben that his services would be dispensed with from 4th February, 1985 on the grounds established by the enquiry, and from consideration of reports from previous schools, St Arnaud and Kings Park High Schools, where Dr Toben had taught between 1980-1983.

Procedures adopted by the Ministry of Education in the dismissal of Dr Toben were in accordance with the Teacher's Federation of Victoria Agreement on Discipline and Dismissal Procedures for teachers."

What Mr Macpherson failed to mention in this briefing is of vital importance - it is what caused Judge Strong to find that I had not been given natural justice.

Mr Macpherson did not mention:

1. The 13 December 1984 letter of allegations, nor
2. the 7 January 1985 Formal Hearing in Dr Curry's office.

The 30 June, 1987 Bulletin article alluded to this crucial hearing matter. When local MP, Bill McGrath, on my behalf, handed Minister for Education Ian Cathie, some material, Cathie is supposed to have said to Bill: "He won't get back in. Not after the Bulletin article."

What excuse has public servant Macpherson to omit such information in a Ministerial Briefing? There is no excuse because Macpherson was the first to make the dismissal recommendation. He was well acquainted with my case.

Then there is Rosalie Hood, Senior Project Officer (Discipline) who, on 5 June 1990, briefed John Evans, Assistant General Manager, PIROB (IR):

"I refer to the attached letters from Dr Fredrick Toben, a temporary post primary teacher who was dismissed from the Teaching Service for incompetence on 4 February, 1985.

Dr Toben has frequently requested to be re-employed as a post primary teacher in the State system.

<u>Background</u>

Dr Toben was employed on limited tenure at Leongatha HS between 14 July and 18 December, 1980. He was given ongoing employment as a temporary teacher and appointed to Kings Park HS on 2 February, 1981. Dr Toben admitted in a letter dated 8 January, 1982, that the Deputy Principal (sic) did not wish to retain him on the staff. Dr Toben writes "we suffered mutually in each others' presence for two terms." He was then absent without leave to study (sic) in Nigeria as the Education Department refused him leave without pay. He resigned from the Teaching Service and returned one year later seeking re-employment.

He was employed again as a temporary teacher to St Arnaud HS in July, 1982. Complaints were made against Dr Toben by parents and students. The complaints concerned obscene language towards students and on one occasion, the manhandling of a student. Concerns were expressed about Dr Toben's competency in the classroom, his working relationship with students, staff and parents and his inability to "accept reminders that he was open to the same rules as other members of staff."

Dr Toben was transferred to Goroke CS from the beginning of the 1983 school year. His performance was deemed to be satisfactory during Term 1 and the Principal said he would recommend permanency. However, according to the Principal at Goroke, problems emerged during Term 2 and the recommendation for permanency was withdrawn. It is unfortunate that Mr McCraw did not advise Dr Toben of this action at that time.

The Principal proceeded with the then Discipline Procedures and established a Support Group in an attempt to overcome the perceived difficulties. As the Principal believed there to be no real improvement, a formal letter of complaint was lodged and an Official Enquiry conducted into Dr Toben's alleged incompetence as a teacher.

The Enquiry Panel found Dr Toben to be incompetent in the following areas:

1. Classroom discipline and management
2. Communication skills

3. Relationships with students
4. Evaluation
5. Teaching Methods used
6. Relationships with other staff members.

The panel also found that on numerous occasions Dr Toben distorted the truth. As a result, Dr Toben was dismissed from the Teaching Service by Dr Curry on 4 February, 1985.

Since that time, he has requested re-employment on numerous occasions and taken legal action. Dr Toben took us to the County Court in December, 1988 seeking:
(i) damages;
(ii) a declaration that his dismissal was null and void; and
(iii) an order that he be reinstated as a teacher.

He put his case on the basis that he was not afforded "natural justice" rather than on the basis of his competence as a teacher.

Judge Strong concluded that although Dr Toben had received a fair hearing on the incompetence allegations, that he had not been given sufficient opportunity to comment upon allegations of disobedience which related to incidents which occurred after the Enquiry was conducted.

Judge Strong concluded that the dismissal was of no legal effect and awarded Toben $16,745.00 for loss of income, calculated on what Toben would have earned as a teacher in the year following his dismissal, less his actual earnings during this period plus interest. However, Judge Strong did <u>not</u> order that Toben be reinstated as a teacher.

Dr Toben lodged an appeal against the County Court decision seeking increased damages and reinstatement.

<u>FULL COURT HEARING</u>

The matter was heard by Sir John Young (Chief Justice) with Justices Murphy and Kaye. We were represented by Michael Dowling (QC) and George Watkins (Junior) whilst Dr Toben represented himself.

The Full Court judgement (delivered 20 March) upheld one part of Dr Toben's appeal on the basis that the County Court Judge had used the incorrect period to calculate Toben's loss of income entitlement, and awarded Dr Toben an additional $2,681.00. However, on the other appeal issue, namely <u>reinstatement</u>, Dr Toben was unsuccessful. Dr Toben's attempts to use the Courts to achieve reinstatement as a teacher have proved unsuccessful. Advice form the Queens Council, Mr Dowling indicates that there are no further channels of legal remedy as Dr Toben would not be granted leave to appeal to the High Court.

Dr Toben has again approached the Ministry of Education and the Ombudsman about the situation and the possibilities of his reinstatement as a teacher. He has also issued a number of Supreme Court writs against a number of officers. The writs relate to defamatory statements allegedly made by officers of this Ministry and of a previous member of the TFV, who was one of the Enquiry panel members.

It is of concern that the writs involve people who made confidential statements to the Enquiry Panel. Dr Toben has been previously advised on two occasions (19 February, 1986 and 27 October 1989) that the Ministry of Education is not prepared to consider an application for employment from him until two conditions are met:

"1. That a period of at least two years had lapsed since the time of his dismissal, and

2. That he was able, at that time, to provide evidence of satisfactory teaching experience during the period since the time of his dismissal. The satisfactory teaching experience would ideally be an ongoing position, but, if this were not possible, experience as an emergency teacher would suffice."

He was further advised that:

"although the first condition has now lapsed it is not the intention of the Ministry to consider employing him in either an ongoing or emergency position until the second condition has been met."

<u>SUMMARY</u>

Dr Toben was found to be an incompetent teacher by an Enquiry Panel. The County Court found that the allegations of incompetence were dealt with in accordance with natural justice.

There were concerns about his performance at two previous schools - Kings Park and St Arnaud High School. Dr Toben has been unable to meet the second condition for consideration for re-employment.

There is currently legal action being taken by him against officer of the Ministry.

<u>RECOMMENDATION</u>

In view of the above, recommend that Dr Toben be advised in writing that the Ministry is not prepared to re-employ him as a teacher."

This internal memo was signed by Rosalie Hood, noted and supported by Frank Peck and Dr Peter Hill, the Chief General Manager.

Again, as Steve Macpherson did in his summary, Rosalie Hood remained silent in the corrupt formal hearing. Had I not taped that meeting, then I would have had no case at all.

Almost a year later, on 17 April, 1991, Rosalie Hood again was busy briefing someone about my request for re-employment.

PURPOSE
1. To brief you about background to Dr Fredrick Toben's continued correspondence with the Ministry.

Background

2. Dr Toben has been corresponding with this Ministry regarding his dismissal and subsequent request for re-employment for the last 7 years.

3. Substantially, the issues covered in the two letters to the Minister have been dealt with in the past by Senior Officers in the Ministry.

Ms A. Morrow, Chief Executive
Mr M.K. Collins, then Chief General Manager
Dr P. Hill, Chief General Manager
Mr F. Peck, Director, Special Initiatives
Mr J. Evans, Assistant general Manager (I.R.)

The Victorian Ombudsman has also examined the issues raised and has provided a response to Dr Toben, a copy of which is attached.

3. (sic) Dr Toben has taken the MOET to both the County and Supreme Courts over his dismissal.

4. He currently has a number of Supreme Court writs against employees of the Ministry.

5. Dr Toben has been advised on many occasions that he will not be re-employed as a teacher until he can demonstrate his competence. He has also been advised that the Ministry is not obliged to prove him with the opportunity to demonstrate that he is a competent teacher.

6. It is of concern that Dr Toben's letter to the Ministry, (MIN 57342, dated 1 February 1991) contains defamatory statements against Dr Hill, claiming that he is either incompetent or a liar.

I attach a summary memorandum and copies of previous letters to Dr Toben for your information.

Recommendation
In view of the above points, apart from responding in this (draft letter attached) in future no further correspondence regarding the same issues to be conducted with Dr Toben.
Prepared by: Rosalie Hood, Senior Project Officer (I.R.)
Endorsed by: Garth Lampe, General Manager, Resource Management Branch
Approved: Barry Pullen, Minister for Education.

EPILOGUE
THIRTY-ONE PARENTS' SURVEY

The 9 January 1985 dismissal letter which, according to Legal Officer George Drossinos, the Director-General wrote himself, contained a new disturbing allegation:

"My main concern must be with the welfare of students in our schools and I believe it would not be in the interests of those students for you to continue to be employed as a teacher in our schools.
Your services are therefore dispensed with from February, 1985."

The implication that I was a threat to students' welfare had to be tested in open forum. And so, during January and February 1985, together with my wife, Georgina, we personally visited all 40 families whose Year 7-10 children I had taught at Goroke.

Each family was handed a form which read:
"Mr Toben taught my son/daughter English/Radio Announcing and I was pleased with the work my child did in this subject. I do not believe him to be a threat to the welfare of my child."

30 parents signed the form and 10 refused. Of those refuseniks, 7 did not wish to become involved in my dispute for personal reasons. They feared repercussions but wished me all the best.
Of the remaining three families, Carracher, Gurney and Ross, had the mothers participate in the enquiry on behalf of the principal. They were also hostile towards us during our visit. Diane Gurney answered my knock on her front door with, "Get off this private property".

Mrs Carracher seemed civil enough but she quickly called husband Geoff who, like a fish about to surface for a gulp of air, informed me he didn't wish to become involved in the dispute.

The following day, at 9.30 am, his wife, Chris, rang the school secretary, Julianne, and informed her of our visit to their home:

"Did you notice his stare from his cold blue eyes", Glenn overheard Julianne ask Chris before she burst into another fit of hysterical laughter.

Julianne had never been overtly hostile towards me. Even my asking her to sign the form elicited a civil response:

"I don't want to get involved in this," she said as I approached her sitting in her car outside Jack's supermarket. "It's over now and it's best forgotten."

Indeed!

Mary Ross was already a nervous wreck when we arrived at her home. Our presence was not appreciated and she quickly called for docile Doug to spring into action - which he did with a shower of abuse.

The others who did not sign were Hausler, Mulraney, Sonego, Stacey, P. Ross and J & D Walter.

As in the past with my defensive activity, this one also drew criticism. It seemed to me that the principle of protecting one's self interest did not apply to me, and served as further proof of McCraw's thesis that I was incompetent.

In a letter, dated 22 April 1985, addressed to Peter Putnam, McCraw stated:

"Following your letter, I've collected my thoughts and jotted down some notes. Here is a summary.
First I've listed the people who approached me to tell me about what Dr Toben (note spelling) had said to them when he visited.

Miss Jess Betson - Church Street Goroke - 053-861144. Ex-teacher - arrived to talk about the school centenary - during conversation began talking about conspiracies - asked her to sign a paper about how badly he'd been treated at school."

Some time later when I wished to check this story's accuracy, Jess Betson said to me that she had never talked to McCraw and that I had never asked her to sign anything, let alone a petition which did not concern her.

"Mr Robert McLeay - Minimay - Talked generally about situation - asked him to sign a paper that he was a fit driver for the Edenhope bus. As Mr McLeay has no children on that bus or any connections with it, he signed it."

Again, by looking at the illogicality of this report, either McCraw or McLeay are not telling the truth. It seems a fact that truth is a rare commodity but valued by few. Why would I want to have McLeay sign a form about my bus driving?

"Mr Graeme Carter - Graeme spoke to staff member, Mrs Val Bull, and in the course of conversation said, 'You people victimized Fred Toben' - when asked to explain he said, 'Well, my kids had run-ins with him but after talking to him it's clear that you lot victimized him. I had 2 years on council with McCraw and I know how he works'."

This risk of a backlash for parents who disagreed with the principal's assessment of my competence had to be met by isolating me from them. McCraw certainly isolated me from the school staff and some students, but he failed to isolate me from the general Goroke community. He expelled me from the environment he controlled but failed to cut me off from grass-root support, though this was not for lack of trying on his part.

"Dr Toben was quoted as saying he intended to visit every parent with children in the secondary school. I could supply a list of names & phone numbers if needed. He visited many more parents than I have listed here & so the main thrust seems to be to get them to sign papers saying he wasn't a threat to their children.

P.S.
Mrs Val Bull - teacher received a letter from Galbally etc. threatening her with a law suit if she didn't withdraw comments made to an unnamed parent about Dr Toben - this was sent to George Drossinos of Ed Dept. Legal Dept. She replied that she couldn't withdraw statements because she didn't know the name of the person, but that she would stand by what she had said anyway."

Again, the incident reads differently to the facts. Val Bull did, in fact, apologize to Mrs Glenda Wright for saying to her that "Fredrick is disturbed and he needs help".
This was in relation to my talking to Glenda outside the school gates where she signed the form. Either McCraw wasn't told the truth or Val, a notorious gossip, couldn't remember approaching Glenda with her apology.

My petition results, though only 30 out of 40 parents signed it, comforted me. it contradicted the contents of the penultimate paragraph in the Director-General's dismissal letter.

On Wednesday, 10 April, the week after Easter, Jim Betson also sent a copy of the dismissal letter to McCraw, after the latter had requested it for protection purposes. Subsequently the letter was tabled at School Council and displayed on the staff notice board. McCraw had hoped the letter would settle down the brewing Centenary of Education committee conflict. Betson expressed a similar view:

"It sets out the reasons for Dr Toben's dismissal and should satisfactorily resolve the situation at the school."

This was not to be. Even without my presence at the school, the problems continued to mount for McCraw.

THIRTY-TWO GOROKE'S CENTENARY OF EDUCATION

One of McCraw's allegations against me was the well-worn cliché : 'You can't get along with people'.

He had pushed this line since I discovered his permanency lie at the end of September 1983, and he continued his hate-campaign throughout 1984. The pressure was considerable, and he succeeded in a limited way within the school environment. My German background was exploited to the full. The so-called 'holocaust' frequently featured in his throw-away lines: Germans gassed Jews at Auschwitz. When challenged to detail this allegation, McCraw would become indignant and walk away from me.

He came to grief when he extended his campaign into the Goroke community. There was the fact that many residents had somewhere a German connection, going back to the 1850s when recently arrived German immigrants left the colony of South Australia and trekked eastwards to Victoria - there to establish sound and solid farming communities in the Victorian Mallee and Wimmera. These pioneers valued their freedom of thought and speech - and that element of dissent flowed through the generations into today's Goroke community.

Freedom of speech caused McCraw to suffer a humiliating defeat because he could not control Goroke's social fabric.

The Centenary of Education dispute graphically illustrated McCraw's pathetic failure in turning the community against me.

Echoes of Dr Curry's rather odd question intrudes here: "But the whole staff is against you!"
Curry, of course, was too blind to see what was going on at Goroke. Perhaps it was more comfortable for him to remain blind to the dynamics of a hate-campaign. My brother was so right when he asked Dr Curry: "I hope you're going to listen and not just carry on…".

The successful February 1984 event, the celebration for the opening of the new school buildings - for which Kevin Johnson had co-opted Glenn and myself to produce a commemorative booklet, which sketchily portrayed the history of each single-teacher school that had been incorporated into what was now Goroke Consolidated School, enthused the planners of the Centenary celebrations. I was looking forward to improving on my effort by producing a substantial book for that occasion.

Half a year later I was therefore pleased to read in the *Goroke Free Press* of 14 June 1984:

"Goroke School Centenary
A Goroke School Centenary meeting will be held at the school on Tuesday 19th June at 8.00 p.m. The public and ex-pupils are urged to attend with ideas on a program to celebrate this occasion in 1985."

On the announced evening the following sat in the school staffroom: John Crabtree and wife, Heather; primary teacher Audrey McLean; farmer's wife Viv Sambell who tendered an apology for her husband, Roger; farmer and husband of Julianne, Colin Stehn; new primary school teachers Sue Campbell and Cathy Coutts, and Glenn Duncan and I.
Point 2. of the minutes, taken by acting secretary Cathy Coutts, stated: "That K. Johnson, G. Duncan and F. Toben be asked to compile a hundred year history booklet, holding in mind that this is only a starting point. Moved S. Campbell, Sec. H. Crabtree."

The meeting had thus noted in writing that 'deposed' School Council President, Kevin Johnson, Glenn and I should consider compiling a book for the occasion.

The Goroke school newsletter of 28 June carried as item 7. The following:

"School Centenary Celebrations:
A meeting was held to form the Centenary Celebration Committee on Tuesday June 19th. As only a few people attended, we intend to call another meeting of interested people on Tuesday July 17th at the school at 8 p.m.
It is most important that as many people as possible attend this meeting so that we can gauge public interest in this matter.
C J Coutts (Acting Secretary)"

On 5 July this message was formulated thus in the local newspaper, *Goroke Free Press*:

"The 3 July School Council meeting considered under General Business:
'Centenary - general discussion as to why the response was so poor, and what could be done to improve this next time - more advertising was recommended'."

So, there we have the beginning of a dispute. The people who attended the first meeting were comfortable enough with the notion of getting the celebrations off the ground. It was School Council representative, Colin Stehn, who expressed doubts about all sorts of things.
On the day of the second centenary meeting, McCraw distributed the following notice:

"Reminder: School Centenary Meeting to be held tonight, 17 July at the school at 8 pm. Please come along and show your support if you want these celebrations to take place. The last meeting was so poorly attended, we are now trying to gauge the feelings of the public as to whether this event should take place."

Later it became evident that this expressed concern had a flip-side to it: it can turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Such negative wording can take the stuffings out of those who bothered to turn up at the first meeting. Perhaps that was McCraw's aim.

The Minutes of the 17 July meeting included some interesting items. Colin Stehn felt that Goroke's committee needed help from Edenhope High School's Back-to-Committee which had successfully staged its celebrations in 1983.

There was also item 12.
"Historical Booklet. Main history of G.C.S. K. Jonhson, F. Toben. B. Mann and G. Duncan accept the position to organise booklet and to send a preliminary report back to Centenary Committee for recommendation."

There was also another item 12. - such typographical errors need not be analyzed in-depth -
which was a request by the committee to School Council for permission to use the school grounds for the celebrations:

"That a letter be sent to School Council requesting the permission of grounds and also seek possibility of obtaining financial assistance as initial starting point.
Moved J. Crabtree, sec. K. Johnson re grounds.
Moved G. Carracher, sec. S. Campbell re financial assistance."

On 26 July, the Goroke Free Press carried the following item:

"**Goroke School Centenary Celebration**.
Next meeting will be held on Tuesday 14 August. All interested people welcome to attend.
Wanted
Goroke School Centenary Committee are interested in any old school photos, magazines or any information relating to the school. All articles will be returned after celebrations.

Janice Sampson (Secretary)."

The new secretary had replaced teacher Cathy Coutts who, for whatever reason, had left the committee. Her colleague, Sue Campbell, also left the committee.

At the 7 August monthly School Council meeting another telling report was made about the July Centenary meeting. It was made under the subheading: COMMITTEES -

"Centenary - Date Easter '85.
Advertise locally for information
Booklet being researched
President: W. Crabtree
Secretary: (vacant) required!
Better attendance, but more support required."

Here for the first time the School Council asserted its authority over the Centenary of Education Committee which was then still called centenary Celebration Committee.

The argument centred around the beginnings of the Centenary Committee. Was the first meeting sponsored by School Council, therefore making the committee a School Council sub-committee? Or, was the first expression of interest in forming the committee, as advertised in the Goroke Free Press, aimed at forming a committee from the wider Goroke community?

McCraw and Hawkins pushed hard to have the committee under their control - especially after a handsome profit had been made during the Easter 1985 celebrations!

Is the conflict surrounding the status of the Centenary committee to be reduced to one of money? Had the Centenary Committee run its project at a loss - what then? Would the negative commentary about the committee have been used to prove that it had not gained community acceptance - that the people in charge were not representatives of the community at large and, by implication, responsible for the loss?

McCraw also used the August School Council meeting to inform members of my alleged incompetence. Usually such matters are not aired so publicly. After all, the two antagonistic student representatives - Brad Stacey and Mark Ross - certainly had to fulfil their duty and report the matter to their Student Action group. Maximum publicity of my alleged incompetence was thus obtained, favouring McCraw's version of events.

Just before I was placed on the Support Group, on 26 June, Ray did tell me that he had tried to help me but that I had refused his help.
My protest at not having refused his help did not succeed in Ray calling off his dogs. He was felt strong enough and he had committed himself in writing. The report to school council was naturally done 'in good faith'; Ken Boston was later to continue this line by claiming that I had refused Support Group help.

The 4 September School Council Minutes noted the Principal's report:

"Dr Toben: no movement presently. Melbourne officials will eventually offer a transfer; any enquiry will follow a refusal of this; time - 5 weeks minimum."

The 27 September edition of the Goroke Free Press informed its readers of the following:

"School Centenary Celebrations:
Because of the apparent lack of interest by the community, we may not be having the School Centenary. A handful of people cannot run this show, so if you are interested please come to our meeting.
Next meeting: October 2nd, at the school at 8 pm.
All welcome."

A handful of people did, in fact, run the show! The four representatives of School Council, however, had disappeared. Coutts, Campbell, Carracher and Stehn simply did not turn up again.
And when the 6 November 1984 School Council meeting erupted, little had been reported about the Centenary committee's work. There was more pressing business to attend to. McCraw had to ensure that Toben's alleged incompetence be fully aired .
Even after my removal from school two days later, failed to get me off the Centenary of Education Committee. Nor did Kevin Johnson's expulsion from School Council cause him to be removed from the Centenary committee. His removal from School Council was for his alleged failure to attend its meetings. But how could he when these meetings clashed with the Centenary meetings!
John Crabtree's resignation from School Council also freed him up for work on the Centenary committee. And so the committee of 16 looked stronger than ever after the 6 November School council eruption had cleared the air somewhat. The committee had developed into a harmonious, cohesive unit consisting of the following:

Heather and John Crabtree, Michael Crabtree (President), Merle Burns (Secretary), Roma and Janice Sampson, Marlene Mulraney, Eunice Ross, Audrey McLean, Kevin Johnson, Brian Mann, Glenn Duncan, Edwin Mitchell, Gordon Mitchell, Murray Redford and Fredrick Toben.

In January I was thrown out of the school house to make way for the sports mistress, Peta Cumming and family. For six months my family and I lived in the flat behind Mitchell's news agency. It was from here and from Kevin Johnson's home at Karnak that the committee operated. Secretary Merle Burns had her huge task spread out in her own home.

When McCraw returned from summer school holidays, he was disturbed to see that I was still living at Goroke. I had begun to drive the Goroke-Edenhope school bus, the first school bus run in the district. The position had become vacant after its former driver, Arthur Mills, had suffered a heart attack. The relief driver, Peter Shaw, caused Blands to be embarrassed because he was receiving unemployment benefits and secretly pocketing the bus wages. When Shaw found out that I had become the permanent bus driver, he walked over to our flat one Sunday morning. Holding a plastic bag containing a torn-up book - *A Patch of Blue* - which I had some time ago given to his step-daughter, Charmaine Gurney - he handed it to me sneering, "Stick that up your arse!"

It was also on the first day of work, after my return from Edenhope, that I was told by bus operator, Clive Bland, of McCraw's phone call to him.

"I believe you've got Fredrick Toben driving one of your buses," McCraw said to Bland.

"Yes, that's right," Bland responded.

"Which one's that?" McCraw asked.

"The Edenhope one," Bland answered.

"Are you aware," McCraw spoke authoritatively, "as to why he was dismissed from school?"

"No," Bland replied.

“I am now informing you officially as to why he was dismissed from the Department. It was through his incompetence as a teacher and his poor relationship with the children. it has been proven that he is incompetent.”

When Clive Bland told me about McCraw’s phone call, he looked visibly upset. He didn’t want to get involved in any trouble with the school - the school which his buses had served for so many years.

I immediately rang John Nunn and asked him to get McCraw off my back. But Nunn simply informed me that he could not do anything about this because it was not a school matter.

I contacted my then solicitor, Galbally and O’Bryan in Melbourne and on 15 March a writ seeking damages and an injunction restraining McCraw from repeating the words was lodged in the Supreme Court of Victoria. There it rested because I could not afford the cost of seeing it through the court system.

In any case, I was too busy working on the Centenary book, and my bus driving was ideal for such work. While driving, ideas would come into my mind and I would record them on my recorder, then transcribe them that night.

The centenary book exposed me to interesting fact about the community’s battle with the Melbourne education bureaucracy which had attempted to close secondary education at Goroke for many years. Heather Crabtree came along with a massive amount of material which detailed the fight they had fought at the end of the 60s and early 70s. The report we received from School Council had remained silent on this conflict which I gladly included in the book:

"**Omission Of Important Facts**
The preceding report fails to mention what happened during 1969-72. It was during this period that a very small group of dedicated citizens challenged the Department not to close the secondary section of the school.
The following table indicates that during this period the school enrolment was indeed quite pleasing. The fall in attendance during 1972 must be seen in relation to Mr Don Gordon’s instructions from the Department to close down the secondary section.”

I could also not share the education philosophy which decried isolated schools as disadvantaged and so I penned the following:

“Although geographic isolation is considered a disadvantage, it must be remembered that some of the greatest educational achievements have been produced in monastic isolation - not amidst the pulsations of the market place.
We may at this point well remember thoughts expressed by one of Victoria’s foremost educators, Frank Tate, who in 1895 said:
‘The success of the education system depends on the character and culture of its teachers’.”

Chris Wisby, then of ABC-Radio’s ‘Morning Extra’ visited Goroke publicise our upcoming celebrations. Macka, of course, also gave us a publicity plug on his ‘Good Morning Australia’.

The book’s progress was pleasing, except for the fact that the principal refused to write an introduction. This upset Gordon Mitchell so much that he wrote the following to the *Wimmera Mail-Times* in Horsham:

Goroke booklet.
Sir, - As vice-president of the Centenary of Education Committee at Goroke, planning a back-to-school at Easter, and as one of the compilers of the book on the centenary of education in Goroke and district schools, I am amazed that our present principal, in his fourth year at Goroke, has not contributed to the book, even though invited to do so.
As a grandson of one of the early selectors of this area, and knowing the hardships and sacrifices made by them in establishing school facilities, I am deeply disappointed.
Gordon Mitchell, RMB 2173, Karnak, Goroke."

McCraw was livid with Gordon and visited him at his home. Unperturbed Gordon let McCraw have his say then calmly said that what he had written to the newspaper was merely the truth. McCraw stormed out of Mitchell's home blubbering something about this having consequences. Gordon smiled because he did not have children at the school and McCraw could not get to him in any way.

Two days later, on Wednesday 27 March 1985, the Wimmera Mail-Times featured a front-page article about a shortage of teachers in district schools. In the lower right-hand corner it featured the caption:

'Director Speaks On Goroke Teacher Dismissal' and on the next page ran an interview it conducted with the regional director of education, Dr Ken Boston.

When McCraw read this in the paper, like his previous irrational response to Gordon Mitchell 's brief letter, he became sick. The 28 March school newsletter announced McCraw's sick-leave:

"Due to events over the last year and portion of this year, Mr & Mrs McCraw are on one month's sick leave. They would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone well for the Centenary."

On Friday, 29 March, the *Wimmera Mail-Times* gave me a right-of-reply to the statements Dr Boston had made about my dismissal.

All this publicity did not have any effect upon the Easter celebrations and the *Goroke Free Press* anticipated a successful event:

Centenary of Education in Goroke & District
The Centenary Committee would like to extend to all the people of Goroke and District a cordial invitation to be present at the celebrations during Easter. The itinerary is as follows:
Saturday, 6th April - Enrolment at 10.00 am for ex-students and teachers. Welcome speeches and unveiling of plaque at 2.30 pm by Sir Willian McDonald and other special guests. Gatherings of various schools for a chat. Cabaret Ball in Goroke Hall at 8.30 pm.
Sunday, 7th April - Combined church service at 12 noon. Junior football match at 2 pm. Displays and activities during the afternoon. Mementoes available for purchase - spoons, glasses, book on history of education of all districts. Anyone requiring any of these mementoes might notify me of the number required as it will help with the ordering.
Tickets for the cabaret $10 each.
Next Meeting at school April 1st at 8.00 pm."

A number of Goroke residents , who had not as yet heard about the details of my dismissal, were now fully informed before the Centenary of Education celebrations.
The victim was, in fact, sitting in the double room selling the book. Notable antagonism came from Mark Ross who entered the room deliberately trying to provoke me. It was Marshall Drummond who chased Ross out of the room. The principal, who had initiated the dismissal, was on sick-leave.

Disaster was to strike School Council President, Edwin Mitchell, at the 2 April School Council's annual meeting at which office bearers were to be elected for the following year.

Relieving principal, Jeff Walker, chaired the meeting which saw Edwin Mitchell rolled - not being re-nominated as President. In his place, and thus presiding President throughout the celebrations, stepped Ron Hawkins, one of the larger landowners and self-confessed 'seeker of peace'.

This change in presidency severed the final link the Centenary of Education Committee had with the Goroke School Council. At least that is what we thought.

After the Easter Weekend, word soon spread that the celebrations had been a great financial success. We even produced a second edition of the Centenary book.

Matters came to a head when School Council attempted to get its hands on the Centenary Committee's money. It began in earnest when Peta Cumming, Secretary of School Council, informed Merle Burns, Secretary of the Centenary Committee, what School Council's wishes were how the profit from the function ought to be spent.

On 4 December, McCraw wrote to each member of the Centenary committee requesting that within 7 days the money be handed over. A covering letter from Hawkins was also included.

This was intolerable 'blackmail' for Edwin Mitchell who then approached the *Wimmera Mail-Times* with his story which appeared on 13 December:

Dispute flares over Goroke's centenary cash.

"A dispute is developing at Goroke over control of money raised at centenary of education celebrations last Easter.
Goroke Consolidated School council has requested in a letter signed by president Mr Ron Hawkins, and another letter from principal Mr Raymond McCraw, that money raised by the centenary committee be handed to the school council within seven days.
The council claims the centenary committee is a sub-committee of the school council.
The centenary committee has moved to give $2000 to a new $8000 school watering system and to place the balance of money, and cash from future sales of stock, about $2800, in a centenary trust account.
The committee is to spend most of the interest on equipment for the school.
The committee says it would mean permanent recognition of achievements during 100 years of education in the Goroke district.
The school council does not approve of the committee's action. It seeks to control all the money so that it has a chance to use it on the watering system.
Immediate past president of the school council, Mr Edwin Mitchell, an active centenary committee member, hotly disputes the notion the committee is a sub-committee.
"Initially, some members of the school council were nominated to form part of a centenary committee. A public meeting was subsequently called, June 1984, with Mr John Crabtree from school council as interim chairman. The second meeting in July elected Mr Michael Crabtree as president."
Mr Mitchell said attendance at meetings were never high and the committee struggled with acting secretaries until Miss Merle Burns accepted the position some months later.
"The official school council representatives dropped out at an alarming rate," Mr Mitchell said.
"Some attended only one or two initial meetings and then drifted away like shadows in the night. It appeared that efforts were being made to undermine the committee."
Mr Mitchell said there were three valid reasons why the centenary committee was not a sub-committee of the school council.
* The committee was never legally constituted as a sub-committee. It was formed as a public committee with school council representation.
The office-bearers were all from outside school council. Sub-committee members shall be appointed by school council, under rules governing school councils.
* The committee was completely autonomous. All arrangements and decisions were made without referral to school council for approval.
For a sub-committee to have these wide powers, a written delegation of authority should have been given . No such delegation was given.
* The committee started as a public committee with some school council representatives, but at the time of the centenary no members of school council were serving on the committee.
The four remaining members who had continued to work on the committee had been excluded, resigned or not re-elected to school council before the centenary.
Under school council rules, a sub-committee shall consist of at least one school council member.
"The fact that the centenary was such an outstanding success both socially and financially was not because of the efforts of either the school principal, Mr McCraw, or the president, Mr Hawkins, who between them attended not one centenary meeting," Mr Mitchell said.
"The principal also failed to contribute to our centenary book which has been one of our most successful efforts, with sales approaching 600 copies."
Mr Mitchell said money for the committee to start sending out invitations for the centenarywas obtained after written request to school council.
"It took four months for the $100 to be forwarded to us and it was repaid in full after the celebration."
Mr Mitchell said the school publicly acknowledged the committee's right to allocate the money.
"In their July 11 newsletter it read: 'The committee will make their choice'.

The school council did likewise in their submission to Kowree Shire Council: 'The centenary of education has been approached to donate'.
This was printed in the Kowree Advocate on November 13.
I am indignant that not only have we not been thanked for our offer of $2000 but the council now wishes to take all the money we have raised."

In a letter published in the *Mail-Times* on 18 December, president of the centenary committee, Michael Crabtree, dissociated himself from Edwin Mitchell's comments:

Sir,- The committee for the centenary of education in Goroke wishes to dissociate itself from the remarks made by Mr E Mitchell in the Mail-Times on December 13.
At our last meeting on December 11, we discussed letters previously published in the Mail-Times by individual members which were not written officially on behalf of this group.
The feeling of the meeting was that no public comment was necessary."

Some Goroke residents in the know informed me that this was because Crabtree was somehow dependent on Hawkins for work and the Mitchell-Hawkins rivalry was well known in town.

Two days later, vice-president, Gordon Mitchell's letter appeared in the paper:

Sir,- As vice-president of Goroke Centenary of Education Committee, I feel I must make a public comment regarding the letter in the *Mail-Times*, December 18, where the president dissociated the committee from Mr Edwin Mitchell's statement in the Mail-Times, December 13.
Mr Crabtree's letter is not an exact account of our last meeting. At that meeting it was agreed that no official public comment be made on behalf of the committee.
However, if any committee member wished to go public on their own behalf, they were quite free to do so.
This is what has been done and at no stage was the committee implicated in the December 13 statement.
In spite of a personal visit and threats of legal action from school principal Mr McCraw, I have written similar letters in the past and will continue to do so in the future, if the need arises to accurately inform the general public of the problems the committee has had to contend with. Why should this dispute have arisen when the school was the only beneficiary?"

Almost a year after the Centenary of Education celebrations the long-running dispute between the committee and school council was laid to rest. The conflict resolution model didn't resemble anything like the Flynn model to which staff had been subjected in 1983.

My reply to McCraw's letter of 4 December 1985 hinted at the reason why there was a dispute in the first place."

13 December 1985
Dear Raymond
I would like to acknowledge receipt of your photocopied letter dated 4 December 1985.
Please note that the Centenary of Education Committee is not a sub-committee of School Council and thus both your letter and Mr R Hawkins' letter, addressed to the non-existent trustees, become irrelevant.
It is hoped that this matter will be clarified with the new school administration in 1986.
While on this topic of funds: In a letter to Mr Graeme Robertson, Regional Office Horsham, you inform him that there is a balance of $240,- of the original TEAC-radio grant which the school received during 1983-4. Would you kindly inform me what happened to this amount which was intended to be spent on the school radio activity.
I believe that no member of staff succeeded in continuing the radio activity after my departure from the school, though Mr B Heggie made some attempts early in the year to get the radio station off the ground again."

McCraw never answered my letter.

When John Wools-Cobb arrived at school I could sense that here there was a man of experience and, what is more important, integrity, who could solve any problem without ripping a whole community apart.
In our first discussion over a cup of tea, Wools-Cobb said to me:

"Had I been principal at the school, you would still be teaching. You'd be teaching elsewhere, not at Goroke, but I would never have dismissed someone like you."

I liked this kind of talk and I invited him to attend the Centenary of Education committee meeting which was to meet the following evening. He readily accepted even though this meant cancelling a dinner engagement.

On Tuesday, 11 February, at 7.30 pm. the committee met with John Wools-Cobb and all the contentious issues literally dissolved before our eyes. President Michael and Vice-President Gordon were appointed as trustees of any money that would still come in from future book sales.

On Monday, 17 February, members of the Centenary committee were warmly welcomed before the assembled school and Michael gladly handed over the cheque to School Council President, Ron Hawkins.

And so democracy was re-established at Goroke Consolidated School. Wools-Cobb's praising the members of the now disbanded Centenary of Education Committee was a much-needed gesture of reconciliation. The new principal ran an open school, something that was evident by his letters which he typed himself. The School secretary was not in his good books because he considered her to be rather incompetent in her secretarial duties.

It was also during 1986 that I extended my community involvement: from voluntary ambulance driving to fire brigade truck on its regular inspection runs and ringing the siren every Monday at 8 pm, to participating in the Tidy Town Competition - which Goroke won in the under 500 population category. This meant that together with Jim Hawks, Edwin Mitchell and Bob Walker, I travelled to Werribee in my trusty Volvo to collect the plaque from the Premier John Cain.

THIRTY-THREE PROCESS WRITING

The 1984 school year began with a celebration - the opening of the new school buildings. McCraw also urged his staff to publicly reveal the mysteries of their work in the classroom by insisting that each teacher, for one week, mount a display of classwork in the school's office foyer.

I focused my week's display on Process Writing, that fashionable theory from the United States which McCraw hailed as a saviour for our semi-literate students.

At the March staff meeting, I raised the matter of remediation because McCraw had begun to celebrate John Bell, the social science teacher, as the guru of process writing.

Besides withdrawing students from my class, the arrangement generally was not satisfactory - and I told McCraw so. When illiterate students don't even know how to sound out the letters of the alphabet, then pushing them into a 'creative' act is torture.

Bell certainly wasn't doing anything to rectify this underlying problem and his much-publicised once-a-week publication of students' work didn't last longer than a month. Students participating in Bell's 'Writing Workshop' soon realized that this wonderful process writing group was made up of all those who had difficulties with English. Some, like Jayne McPhee, were not remedial but McCraw's social prejudice forced her into this group so that the inclusion of Brad Stacey was covered through her presence there.

This is what Bell dared publish in the School newsletter:

Writing Workshop
Each week for one English period in the secondary school, a group of students from Years 7,8 and 9 take part in a language workshop using the 'process' approach to creative writing. This method of writing is one which has been used extensively in our Primary school and others throughout the state in recent years. It has produced excellent results with Primary students and it is hoped that we can achieve similar standards right through the school. For further information regarding 'process' writing with Secondary students, pelase contact John Bell at the school.
With every newsletter until the end of the year, a sheet such as this will be attached showing examples of students' efforts. This week's issue featured an article by Brad Stacey.

GIANT ELEPHANT LOOSE!!!!!!!!!!
I was walking home from school one day, when I passed the zoo and saw that Fat the elephant was gone. I went into town and saw Jack's and Joan's was flat on the ground.
I jumped into a car and slammed the door. There were people running everywhere. At last I got to my house and saw that Fat the elephant was about to lean on my door. "Stop!", I cried and Fat stared at me. I was standing there with a mouse. Fat ran everywhere. He sat on my car, then on my cat and ran over my foot.
It took three years to clean all the town up. Joan's and Jack's had been rebuilt and Fat had been shipped of to the Sahara.

And this from a boy in Year 9 and student representative on school council! Without professional shame Bell, and McCraw, celebrated illiteracy.
When the novelty of it all faded, when students were faced with their underlying literacy problems, Bell had no solution, no cure. You cannot solve such problems by telling students to 'just write a story'. When the tolls of trade are blunt, broken or not available, how can a student get on with process writing? Neither McCraw nor Bell listened to what I had to say. All I did by attempting to discuss this matter with them was to 'upset' them by making proposals which disagreed with their failing efforts.

The fact hat Bell couldn't sustain his writing workshop speaks for itself.

I based my view not only on what I believed but I had an authority to rely upon: none other than the Executive Officer of the Post-Primary English Committee, Education Department, Kaye Nolan who had defined the matter thus:

" What is 'process writing'?

Post-primary teachers are asking this question, stimulated by the process approach to writing in the primary school. It may be a case of the jargon hiding the educational implications. Teaching 'process writing' is simply teaching writing well and many post-primary teachers have been doing this for years.

Consider this analogy. The art/craft teacher does not hand a lump of clay to a student with instructions to make a pot and then hand it in for marking. The teacher demonstrates, to do a similar thing with students' writing.

The PPEC plans to consider methods of implementing good writing programs at all levels. Please let us know about any good ideas or methods of organisation which have worked for you. We can then share them with other teachers interested in teaching writing well."

It was, however, not good enough for me to merely criticise McCraw's and Bell's approach. I had to demonstrate and prove that I could do better. Lead by example is a maxim I worried about.

Yet, the problem remained: What can we do with reluctant learners, with students who have not mastered the art of writing meaningful and coherent sentences?
The principal's answer was to shroud this remediation problem in a cloak of 'process writing' deception.

My foyer display graphically illustrated the creative writing process. I headed my display:
WRITING AND PUBLISHING A BOOK, using the Year 7's 'A VERY SHORT TALL STORY'

Copies of work was displayed under the various headings: The Beginning - First Copy - Second Copy - 1st Good Copy - 2nd Good Copy - Final Copy - The Final Product.

The book not only illustrated the creative writing process but it also had become a real inter-disciplinary co-operative effort between the art and English departments at the school.

It was hard work for both Glenn Duncan and I to sustain students' interest throughout first term.

We also detailed the background philosophy - how it was done.

"This is a combined Year 7 effort in creativity. It all started in the third week of Term I, 1984, when the English and art departments decided that an illustrated story, depicting the students' visual and literary imagination, would be developed and captured in book-form.

The first stage of this process consisted in thrashing out the story-line during art and English lessons. We were bombarded by a multitude of wonderful ideas, many which had to be discarded. A selection of ideas was made by the students, then developed into a coherent story.

The story was then broken up into paragraphs, each student selecting the paragraph that most closely contained his or her original contribution.

The next stage consisted of each student developing a visual interpretation of the written work. At this point the visual prototype of the fairy and the gnome emerged.

During graphic communication each student was able to make use of original drawings of each character and come up with a unique adaptation - and from this drawing plan the lino prints were produced.

The final stage saw all the students cutting and gluing pages into book-form.

This occurred in the last week of Term I."

Following on from this account, we also expressed our underlying philosophical attitude towards our work:

"The creative state of mind is the courage to think differently, questioning conformity and fearlessly exploring the unknown. Creativity can be developed through a flexible mind and a skilful hand working as one.

It is wrong to consider one better than the other because one without the other cannot produce creativity. If the creative impulse is suppressed, individual freedom is threatened, conformity begins and true artistic development stops."

I welcomed words of praise for our work - but McCraw remained silent. Alan Mayberry, head of student publication, Curriculum Branch of the Education Department, congratulated the students for their effort.

Similarly, Kaye Nolan, Executive Officer, Post-Primary English Committee, Education Department, had this to say in her letter of 6 July 1984:

Dear Class Members
The Post-Primary English Committee has asked me to write congratulating you on the production of your wonderful book.
It was tabled at the last general meeting of the Committee and we were all impressed by the story, artwork and quality of its production.
It has obviously taken a great deal of time and work to put together and the result has been well worth it.
We would be interested in seeing any further work you might be doing and wish you well with your writing in the future.
Thank you for sharing your story with us.
Yours sincerely
Kaye Nolan

In November 1985 I sent Dr Norman Curry a copy of our book. The Director-General, six months after dismissing me, had himself been removed from his post into position specially created for him - the President of the Library Council Of Victoria:

Dear Dr Toben
Thank you for sending me the copy of the story by Year 7 students of Goroke which I have read with interest and appreciation.
I am returning this to you. I am sure the students gained a great deal from their involvement in this project.
I regret that you are facing such difficulties and I hope and pray that you will, with the support of your family, be able to overcome them.
Yours sincerely
Norman G Curry

A year later I sent a copy of the book to Dr David Cohen, then Associate Professor of Education, Macquarie University, Sydney. This is what he said in his letter of 26 August 1986:

Dear Year 7 English Class and Mr Toben,
It was really so thoughtful of you to send me the copy of your book "A Very Tall Short Story" to read. This very impressive story and artwork, together with the photographs of the contributors, are indeed marvellous illustrations of the points I was making in my recent article "Analysis Explodes Myth of Declining Standards" as published in Education Age of July 1, 1986. Congratulations on your hard work and successful efforts, and every good wish for your futures.
Yours sincerely
(Dr) David Cohen

All this praise did not help me but I proved that work-output in government schools can be raised to a higher level than McCraw himself reflected in his own shoddy and scruffy casualness.

I browsed through my references and found one written twenty years ago. In 1965, I had received a reference from George Browne, Emeritus Professor of Education, University of Melbourne:

This is to introduce Mr Fredrick Toben who was a member of a team of four, who worked under my direction at GTV-9, in a session of 74 talks called 'Improve Your English'.
Mr Toben who was born in Germany, is a young man of considerable charm and definite ability. His work was to translate the procedures in the course to recently arrived German migrants using television as the medium of communication. He himself spoke perfect English. He has fine personal qualifications and a sense of responsibility.
I can recommend him with confidence for any position which his rather unusual talents and qualifications may suit.
G S Browne

Unfortunately such references did not help resolve my conflict with McCraw and his process writing fadism

There was also no intention to show-up Bell's work as fraudulent because Duncan and I were more intent on challenged ourselves to do the best. Bell, in any case, was the school jester and students liked him because he offered them his first name.
He was also quite 'creative' in his own way and his staff cricket list illustrated this well:

"Teachers' team to play…sorry, demoralize students in cricket match to be played at lunch-time Wed. 15th and Fri. 17th February.

Sue (Crusher) Campbell
Bruce (Holocaust) Heggie
Robert (Fearless) Ferlazzo
Peta (Cannonball) Cumming
Mark (Whirlwind) Weezbung
Jenny (Ruthless) Ryan
John (Blitzkrieg) Bell
Cathy (Crucifier) Coutts
Glenn (Dynamite) Duncan
Fredrick (Tyrant) Toben

Ray (Murderer) McCrawOf all staff members it was Bell and McCraw who were the most obsessed with my German background. Their anti-German nonsense flourished even after my dismissal from the school. During the defamation action in the Victorian Supreme Court I produced this item as evidence of malice - something corrupt Justice David Harper rejected.

When I asked McCraw to read out the list he stumbled while reading out the names, exchanging My name for Bell's - a Freudian slip?

The key words, 'holocaust' and Blitzkrieg', reveals Bell's ingrained prejudice against anything German. Then again, perhaps Bell didn't have the intelligence to understand what he was doing when drawing up this list. Still, his influencing the students bore fruit a year after my dismissal from the school.

The *Wimmera Mail-Times* ran the following story on 3 January 1986:

Graffiti attack on ex-teacher
A former English teacher at Goroke Consolidated School was the centre of a graffiti scrawled attack on New Year's eve.
Dr Fredrick Toben said last night he was sick and tired of abuse since his dismissal by the Education Department earlier last year.
"I've had enough," he said. "It's time the whole ordeal was over."
Police spoke to six Goroke teenagers after graffiti was painted over windows of a news agency in the town.
Graffiti included abuse to Dr Toben, swastikas and warnings of 'Steady Eddie' to shop proprietor and former Goroke school council president Mr Edwin Mitchell. One window is pictured above.
Mr Mitchell said last year school staff requested his resignation as council president for alleged bias towards Dr Toben.
Dr Toben said the swastikas were particularly hurtful. He was born in Germany but left before he was ten years old.
Goroke police said last night the teenagers had since cleaned the shop windows and apologised.

Brad Stacey, Mark Ross and Charmaine Gurney were responsible for this attack and because they had been given full principal support for their anti-Toben campaign, it was not to be expected that they would offer me an apology as well. The following from the *Wimmera Mail-Times* of 8 January 1986 says it all:

No apology for Toben

Teenagers responsible for a graffiti attack against a former Goroke Consolidated School teacher have refused him an apology.
Former English teacher at the school Dr Fredrick Toben said people involved had denied him an apology but had apologised to Mr Edwin Mitchell and cleaned graffiti from the windows of his news agency at Goroke.
The news agency was attacked on New Year's eve with signs of abuse to Dr Toben, swastikas and warnings to Mr Mitchell.
Mr Mitchell said last year school staff requested his resignation as council president for alleged bias towards Toben.
"I was prepared to accept an apology for the graffiti," Dr Toben said yesterday. "I was a child once and I did things too, but I knew when to stop. This has gone too far."
Dr Toben said he was concerned for the future of his young son.
"I drive the Edenhope bus. I believe that two of the children involved in the attack are passengers. I also have a son who has started school this year and if these children aren't kept in check, what's he going to have to go through?"

It is interesting to see that even as the twentieth century comes to close, this vexed problem of anti-German propaganda is still with us, if not markedly on the increase. Every day there is some media item that speaks about World War II and what the Germans are alleged to have done to the world.

Likewise, literacy, or lack thereof, in our young students is still with us. Interestingly, teachers are now required to attend study courses which help them with their own literacy. McCraw, Bell and Weegberg would have done well to attend such courses during their time at Goroke.

Whether our Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's work is also designed for them and their anti-German hatred, is another matter. In fact, the HREOC refuses to support those of German background who are sick and tired of being exposed to this blatant anti-German racism. It appears that owing to the fact that Germany still has not as yet signed a peace treaty with its former World War II enemies it is still open season to persecute Germans and Australians of German descent.

In time, though, this kind of racism will need to be addressed, and when it is, the question of the truth of the allegation - that Germans systematically killed European Jewry in homicidal gas chambers - has to be addressed.

French Professor, Dr Robert Faurisson, has thrown out a simple challenge which no-one to date has accepted. He asks those who state that Germans killed Jews in homicidal gas chambers to "show me or draw me a homicidal gas chamber". It just cannot be done because the homicidal gas chamber story is a fraud, or as Professor Arthur Butz refers to it in his book's title *The Hoax of the 20th Century*.
Dr Wilhelm Stäglich's *The Auschwitz Myth*, Ties Christophersen's *The Auschwitz Lie* and Ernst Zündel's *Did Six Million Really Die?* address the same historical lie, namely: The Holocaust Dogma of Judaism.
What started out as war-time propaganda has now been accepted as an indisputable historical fact - which is not permitted to be discussed in open forum. What happens if you do? You are then subjected to a barrage of abuse in the form of being labelled as: anti-Semite, anti-Jewish, racist, neo-Nazi. British historian, David Irving, was asked whether he was an anti-Semite. His reply was short and to the point: "Not yet!" Revisionist Ernst Zündel was asked: "Are you a neo-Nazi?" He replied: "No, I am not a neo-Nazi. I am a Nazi!"

And so the historical debate continues in a most violent form. In Germany especially, anyone who dares approach the World War II historical period with some objectivity is immediately branded a fascist, Nazi, anti-Semite, etc. Similarly in France, Austria and other European countries, anyone who dares question the details of the gas chamber allegations is quickly heavily fined or put in prison, such as Günter Deckert and Udo Walendy in Germany and Professor Faurisson and Pierre Garaudy in France.

This terrible 'holocaust dogma' has a dreadful effect on Europe's intellectual development. It has stifled any worthy debate within all sectors of education - similarly to what is happening in Australia.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR PAST EXPERIENCE: St Arnaud & Kings Park

Much was made of my alleged problems at two of my previous schools. What was the substantial nature of such claims? Was it mere scape-goating by individuals who themselves had had a history of conflict, and who now wished to mature beyond this point at my expense?

Such persons would have known that it takes time to establish oneself as a teacher within a school community. It cannot be done within six months, and emergency or relief teachers often served as cannon fodder for staffroom politics.

A system that's sick must, of necessity, be made up of people who are sick. I shall not spell out the implications of such for our education system.

St Arnaud Secondary College

The newly appointed principal of then St Arnaud High School , Peter Schmidt, wished to introduce an 'open-door' principalship. His informal approach was appreciated by some and seen as hypocritical by others. Schmidt openly boasted about his own private school education. Our job in the government school system, especially at junior level, he regarded as one of child minding. He advised teachers , if they were not already members of the Labor Party, to join so as to enhance job prospects. After all, he was a card-carrying member - and it had helped him! He also predicted that at the next state election there would be a change of government, from Liberal to Labor.

I was stunned by what I found at St Arnaud High. Frank O'Dea's English Department was in a mess. He praised me for walking into my Year 8 English class with poetry book in hand!
During 1993 when I asked Frank for a reference to counter the negative one presented by principal Peter Schmidt, Frank obliged. When I asked him to appear for me as a witness at the forthcoming defamation trial., frank could not be located. Corrupt judge, Justice David Harper, pretended that he could have O'Dea arrested for not turning up in court. He then suggested that the written letter could be, subject to defendant's counsel agreeing, accepted as evidence. I declined for Harper to issue an arrest warrant. It was a failure of nerve that made O'Dea not turn up. This was enough of a moral victory for me - he was a coward! I did not need the perverse sensation of kicking a dog when it is down.
Interestingly, the world-wide continuous hunting down of so-called old 'Nazis' illustrates how sick the hunters are. In one respect this is understandable considering the stakes: having lied to the world for over 50 years must have mental consequences for all those who unashamedly exploited the situation and blackmailed so many people into silence.

Perhaps, then again, it is the Pied Piper situation. The Pied Piper is not the evil person but rather the Elders of the town of Hammelin who did not honour their contract with the piper.
Likewise, we have a whole generation of elders which has lied to the younger generation about World War II history, and what the Germans are supposed to have done to Europe's Jewry.

At St Arnaud students enjoyed my English lessons, especially those during which the computer generated efforts at poetic expression touched upon some raw language use. Docile dodos suddenly pricked up their ears and their eyes lit up, thereby proving to me that the windows to their soul can be opened….but at what expense of energy.

The first time I became aware of any serious problems was my receipt of Dr Curry's letter about the McVitty incident, dated 20 September 1982. When I showed Schmidt my reply to Curry's letter, he advised me not to send it off. I listened to his advice but still sent the letter off.

Julie McVitty, a lazy disruptive student, informed her father that I had called her a "tarty little slut", words not part of my vocabulary. McVitty, lodge member, town and school councillor, and who had a prior conviction for assault, wanted to settle the matter without finding out the facts. Schmidt advised against it and informed the Director of Secondary Education, Mr T J Ford on 7 September 1982 that "Mr McVitty did not threaten either myself or Mr Toben but hoped he would be able to retain his self control. The Rev Faulkener and I wish still to protect both parties and my senior staff who are aware of the incident (Messrs B Brasier and F O'Dea) agree with this view."

Soon I received Dr Curry's 20 September 1982 letter:

Dear Dr Toben
I have received a letter from Mr J McVitty complaining of words he alleges you used to his daughter Julie. I have subsequently obtained a full report of the incident from your Principal, Mr Schmidt. I understand that you were aware of the complaint made by Mr McVitty.
Mr Schmidt's report indicates that he has been unable to find a student who can confirm that the words alleged to have been used were indeed used. Nevertheless, it seems clear than an uncomplimentary remark of some kind was made.
Disparaging comments and name-calling can only be described as negative and inappropriate class management strategies which are unlikely to encourage willing co-operation from students.
I understand that, in the five weeks you have taught at St Arnaud Mr Schmidt has noted your involvement in four incidents including the McVitty complaint. One of the other incidents involved the manhandling of a student.
It is a wise maxim never to lay your hands on a student in praise or blame. Physical violence towards students cannot be condoned.
All incidents have about then a suggestion of a quick tempered response on your part and an absence of a co-operative trusting relationship between you and your students and their parents. The development of such relationship is regarded as an essential feature of our schools. It will only occur if teachers adopt positive and supportive strategies when working with students while still requiring reasonable standards of behaviour and effort.
You will recognize that I am expecting you to change your approach. I would recommend that you seek advice on how this can be done from the Principal and senior staff.
I understand that you are a conscientious teacher. I trust that you will be able to appropriately modify your teaching style.
Yours faithfully
Norman G Curry
Director-General of Education

My reply was dated 24 September 1982:

Dear Dr Curry
I am in receipt of your letter of 20 September 1982, and I have noted its contents. I now beg to state my case:

1. I have been teaching long enough to not commit such a gross faux pas as I have been accused of by Mr McVitty. I am in contact with parents: when I had cause to contact Mr McVitty concerning his daughter's class behaviour and class performance, he informed me of his letter to you.
He had, according to his version of the incident, apparently waited for a word from the Principal that would bring us together for a discussion of the issue. Similarly, after the Principal informed me of the complaint, I immediately requested to meet Mr McVitty, together with his daughter, in the Principal's office.
I was later informed that this meeting was not immediately arranged because Mr McVitty is known to have reacted physically during an altercation in town a while ago. It is because of this that the Principal wished to introduce a cooling-off period. Yet, according to Mr McVitty, the apparent silence from school left him full of indignation and no alternative but to seek redress via his letter to you.
On Thursday, 23 September 1982, I had reason to pass the McVitty garage and I decided to call in for the sake of meeting this man. I also wished to reassure him that I do not swear in class nor do I insult students.
I offered my rationale for this attitude of mind: an insult or a swear-word is a cliché construct devoid of rational thought. Hence it explains nothing, nor does it deepen our understanding of the uncomfortable situation that gives rise to such verbal and emotional reaction.
Mr McVitty remained adamant about his daughter not telling lies at home, and I continued to assure him that I did not insult his daughter. He offered to show me his daughter's fine school reports of the past which, according to him, prove that her recent surly behaviour in class must be the teacher's fault.
I informed him that his daughter's misbehaviour in class is unobtrusive because it consists of a well-shrouded act which hide derisive remarks. This results in her neighbour openly verbalising in disruptive fashion.
Further, her written work is also wanting - basic spelling and sentence construction is not pleasing.
Mr McVitty advised me that another parent had complained to him about my use of insulting language in class. This time I apparently called a student "slack-arse".
When I again assured him that this phrase, together with "tarty slut", is not a part of my vocabulary he said his daughter does not lie to him.
Sir, I beg you to check up about my language-use in class at both Kings Park and Leongatha High schools.
As a school councillor, Mr McVitty continued, he feels obliged to listen to incoming complaints about me, and he intends to raise the matter at the next council meeting on 6 October 1982.

The enthusiasm and the self-righteous tone of his announced intentions puzzles me because it appears so final and absolute.

2. My basic pedagogical principles do not embrace the concepts of student rejection, exclusion or violent physical contact. My class management is based on firm democratic but disciplinary principles.
This I have now somewhat revised - and I shall not fight for each student's well-being. Absolutely uninhibited students, who cannot control either their language or their behaviour in class, are now sent out of the room.
During my five weeks at this school I attempted to give the known trouble-makers a clean break. But when a student slovenly meandered around the room, then refusing to sit down and calling me a "f------ pommy", I briskly walked towards him and assisted him into his seat. This assistance consisted of my hand holding on to some hair at the back of his head, then applying some pressure so as to guide him into his chair. I then clearly requested him to contact his mother so that we could further discuss this blatant act of insolent disobedience. That evening the mother contacted the Principal and I heard nothing further from her. The Principal informed me of basic school regulations which prohibit any physical contact.

I am aware of this regulation and hence my admonishments are given in a paternalistic fashion which rules out any uncontrolled act of aggression or violence. My own school days keep me very humble and understanding in respect of misbehaviour. Yet in the past twenty years I have noted that an apparent contradiction is evident on the issue of corporal punishment in schools. It appears that the parents who violently condemn such forms of punishment are often terribly violent and dictatorial in their own home - and students from such backgrounds find a pleasant relief in an environment where any form of physical admonishment is ruled out. I beg you again to consult my previous schools in respect of my ability to control classes.

3. Problem students are often experiencing scholastic difficulties - and this I appreciate. I wonder how far this problem can be solved by excluding them from the normal class-system. Or, how effective is remedial work?

In English Language and Literature lessons we are constantly confronting students with basic value systems. Some students may find such experience uncomfortable and hence their avenues of excape are always tied up with the aim of disrupting a lesson. I firmly believe that semi-illiterate students must be confronted with situations that do not permit them to avoid or verbally excuse personal application. When a Year Eight student incited a minor commotion by handing an 'obscene' pencilcase-lid around the room, I requested him to leave the lid at home. The justification for this was not based on any moralistic objection. In fact, when the student protested 'because it's dirty?', I replied with a firm no. It was far simpler than that - the object was distracting boys and girls from solid work. When the lid appeared again the next lesson I confiscated it. I then informed the Principal and asked for clarification as to what school policy was on such matter. Confiscation and return at the end of the year would be appropriate - I subsequently informed the boy of this decision. The student protested violently when I informed him of my intentions. He threatened to bring his father to school. When I told him that I would welcome such a meeting, but that the boy would also have to attend, he said he could not do that because "I don't like to see blood flow."

Two days ago the Craft teacher recognised the lid on my desk and expressed his displeasure over the disfigurement and wastage of good wood. He requested the student to appropriately restructure the lid. I believe this has now been done.

4. After my arrival at St Arnaud High School I was allocated two Year nine Geography classes, and I inherited a half-completed assignment from the previous teacher. At this point I had not found out what marking scheme the school was using. Further, because of my recent arrival and unfamiliarity with the scholastic standard of each class, I adopted a flexible marking scheme. I ranged my scores from F- to P++.

One student was given P+ together with the comment 'incomplete'. A mother requested an interview with me concerning this matter. She could not reconcile a good pass mark with the comment. I pointed out to her that the comment was written next to one specific question, and despite an incomplete anser the student's overall quality of work was indeed quite pleasing. The parent further complained about my placing a score sheet on the information board of the Geography room. All marks gained by students for various assignments and exercises, together with blanks for non-submission, were thus clearly available to all students. She felt that an unnecessary competitive element would be introduced into the classroom. I informed her that I had obtained clarification from the Principal on this matter, and that he has left this up to the individual teachers' discretion.

An apparent contradiction appeared during our discussion when the mother informed me that the students compare marks in any case. This was my justification for publicising the marks. I brought out into the open something the students were doing privately. That such publicity may stress a teacher's personal marking scheme is thereby acknowledged. Yet, assessment is also made accessible to students - students have a right to know how a mark is arrived at. Yesterday I received a petition from the class concerned about this issue. Apparently some students had requested the Principal to act on their behalf - but Mr Schmidt had not had the time to speak to me about it. I responded to the ensuing spontaneous class discussion by asking a student to remove the offending sheets. A sigh of relief overcame the class - and during that period solid work was achieved by most. This latter incident raises issues beyond mere class management strategies - the whole spectrum of what education is, where it is going, etc., lies within the assessment problem. I endeavoured to explain theses implications to the mother, but after an hour - long discussion with her, she assured me that matters had not been clarified. I begged her to again state the problem so that we could continue discussing the matter further, but she refused this request.

5. When I began at St Arnaud I bore in mind that a start half-way through the school-year would require some personal adjustments. My year lecturing to eager students in Nigeria spoilt me somewhat. Students there pursued scholarly endeavours quite eagerly - something I found very rewarding. Privately I have been informed that students at this school give new staff - members the 'rough-treatment' until they conform to what the students want. I am quite prepared to feel myself into the system, but I cannot condone blatant acts of laziness. I would like to mention the fact that I have also been complimented by some parents on my classroom endeavours. This latter form of praise, together with the malicious attack, have forced me to evaluate my brief stay at this school. It is not in my personal nor that of my

family's interest to split the school community, as Mr McVitty suggests my presence is doing. Nor do I wish to be a catalyst for the battle of values that is besetting Government schools.

I am terribly sorry about this whole business and I would like to assure you again that I do not insult students. My wife is familiar with my vocabulary - and she too was astounded by this accusation. Rarely do I use expletives for the reason given earlier. The four incidents highlight what you succinctly express in the last sentence of your letter - and I shall attempt to adapt to the of my ability without compromising my standing as a professional teacher.

Yours faithfully

Fredrick Toben

Encl.: 1. Copy of Julie McVitty's work.
2. Photocopy of pencilcase - lid and sample of student's written work.

Colleague Geoff Rigby, to whom I had also shown this material, felt that the whole thing had been blown out of all proportions - he had called students worse names!

Two days later I gave a copy of my letter to Peter Schmidt:

Dear Peter
Please find enclosed a copy of my letter to the Director-General. Owing to the serious nature of the McVitty charges, I would like to have the opportunity of addressing the School Council so that I can answer the charges Mr McVitty intends to lay against me. I believe this whole matter is to be brought to the Council's attention on 6 October 1982.
Yours sincerely
Fredrick Toben

Schmidt didn't like the letter I was about to send to Curry and he advised me against sending it to him. I ignored his advice, and on 7 October 1982 Dr Norman Curry responded thus:

Dear Dr Toben
Thank you for your letter of September 24.
I appreciate the points you have raised in your letter and the difficulties that have been faced.
I am sure you will want to discuss these and other issues from time to time with the principal.
I accept that you do not set out to insult students - to do so would be an indication of lack of verbal skill and a lack of care for students. Your letter indicates that neither of these is the case.
Yours sincerely
Norman G Curry
Director-General of Education

Schmidt also became conciliatory towards me, and in a letter to Secondary Staffing's Mr Gene Haugh, he wrote:

Dear Gene,
Enclosed are two statements of competency for two extended emergency teachers - Mrs D Blake and Dr G F Toben.
Dr Toben's work has improved and he will be quite a competent teacher. He is hard working and willing!
Regards
Peter A Schmidt

On 5 November Schmidt formalised this in a

<u>To Whom It May Concern: Re: Dr G F Toben</u>
This is to state that Dr G F Toben has been on the staff of this school since July this year and has shown himself to be a good competent teacher. He is developing a good teaching style, based on thorough preparation and correction, and has willingly participated in co-curricular activities. His relationship with students is developing and in his classes he demands a high standard of work and demeanour. As a staff member he has developed a good working relationship with the staff as a whole. He can be recommended for a temporary position.
Yours faithfully
Peter A Schmidt
Principal

At the end of December 1982 I thus applied for a temporary position, and staffing officer, Mr Gene Haugh, reacted by penning the following in his own hand:

I don't think I can stand any more of Dr Toben. he just won't lie down!!!!
Appointed Goroke from 1/2/83.
Would you please answer this letter for me - and place all on the ever-growing Toben file.
GMH 26/1/83.
Mr Rod Snow - Sec Rec. - 8th Floor

Peter Schmidt's assessment of my competency as a teacher was revised on 10 July 1984, at the height of my troubles with Goroke Primary Principal, Ray McCraw:

Re: Dr Fredrick Toben
Dr Toben was appointed by Central Staffing to this school in 1982 against a vacancy which had occurred, as an extended emergency teacher.
Allegations were made by a parent concerning use of unsuitable language in a class room. Dr Toben denied the allegation which was never proved. The matter was taken to the Director General by the parent. Dr Toben was, I believe, exonerated.
Later in the year I assessed Dr Toben at his request as a class room teacher who wished to join the department as a temporary assistant. I had doubts about his ability as a teacher since he did not have good rapport with students in general, and his working relationship with the staff was questionable. However, he was given the benefit of the doubt and recommended.
Subsequently he showed he had poor relationship with the staff and I was also unhappy with his performance by the end of the year. Likewise, his relationship with parents did not appear to be a pleasant working one as I received a number of complaints by the end of the year.
In January, 1983, I spoke to central staffing who informed me that Dr Toben had been appointed to the staff of this school. As he had been on the staff and was less than satisfactory, I did not want him on the staff again. in any event, at that time, there was no vacancy to fill. He was then appointed to Goroke.
In summary, I would not want Dr Toben as a member of this staff. His competency in the classroom was lacking: his working relationship with students, staff, and parents left a lot to be desired.
If he was on this staff at present he would have to have shown vast improvement in these areas to avoid a 'less than satisfactory' procedure being initiated.
Senior staff of this school concur with this assessment.
Yours faithfully
Peter A Schmidt
Principal.

This principal gloated over his own private school education, then informed me that he was a card-carrying Labor Party member, and advised me to join up if I wished to make teaching my career. I politely declined his invitation.
That he wrote this letter at the request of the Goroke principal, thereby withdrawing his positive recommendation of 5 November 1982, leads me to speculate about this man's profession and moral integrity. Perhaps my December 1982 research into his school's English performance upset him somewhat.

On 29 September 1984, Mr David Kruger, history co-ordinator of the school had written a favourable report which contradicted Schmidt's statement:

To Whom It May Concern
As a teacher at St Arnaud High School, I met Mr Toben when he joined the staff for the second half of 1982.
During that time I observed him to be punctual, keen, conscientious and reliable. His appearance was consistently neat and well groomed. His Germanic origin was not obvious in his clear diction and well chosen, impeccable vocabulary.
While Mr Toben was at St Arnaud, he participated in community activities such as the volunteer fire brigade. Mr Toben read widely, followed current affairs and did not hesitate to work during recess, lunch breaks and after school.
Within the school curriculum as an extension of his work as an English teacher, Mr Toben initiated a radio station - planned, operated and co-ordinated by students. The project was well received by students. The radio station group seemed to like working with Mr Toben and responded well to the trust he showed in them.
Mr Toben's demeanour was one of dedication and thoughtfulness.
David Kruger

Interestingly, Peter Schmidt left the Victorian education system with a little bit of a bang. He was featured in the *Sunday Herald-Sun* on 26 May 1991 where journalist Damien Murphy had this to say:

Principal quits in anger at ministry

The principal of Geelong's top state secondary school has resigned, disgusted with bureaucrats chosen by the State Government to run the Education Department.

Mr Peter Schmidt left his job this week after being principal of Matthew Flinders Girls' High School for seven years.

Mr Schmidt said he had lost faith in the Education Ministry because it now lacks "real leadership".

"People without a great deal of knowledge about schools are making decisions about schools," he said.

"Many, many principals have the same level of dissatisfaction with the ministry."

Mr Schmidt, 51, has been with the Education Department for 30 years, teaching mainly in rural centres with four years in Melbourne.

His resignation came as Victorian principals took industrial action in support of a log of claims which included a demand for a 30 per cent pay rise.

Mr Schmidt said he resigned this week to give the Matthew Flinders school council adequate time to choose a principal for next year.

He said he fully supported the VCE and his school had adopted the new course enthusiastically, introducing Chinese in the hope that it would become part of the core syllabus.

The vice-president of the Victorian Association of Principals in Secondary Schools (VAPSS) Mr John Tol, warned that an "enormous number of principals were annoyed with the ministry and further resignations were expected.

"Peter is definitely not the only principal to lose faith in the way the ministry works," he said.

"It's sad that senior administrators in the ministry are resorting to this action, but principals have got to the end of their tether."

A spokeswoman for Education Minister, Mr Pullen said yesterday he had no comment to make.

Spokesmen for the ministry were not available for comment.

What is not mentioned in this article is the fact that lucrative superannuation packages were still available at the time Schmidt retired. One wonders where Schmidt's commitment to raising educational standards really lay.

Kings Park Secondary College

When I joined the Education Department in July 1980, I was posted to Leongatha High School. I was impressed with acting principal. Vic Roland's sincerity and concerns about education. He was, however, pushing a sad, solo uphill battle against 'progressive' education forces. Betty Stevens, for example, totally embraced the VSTA's union ideology of social justice, etc. Other teachers pushed their personal barrows of sexual liberation. Lesbianism and gay rights was the in-thing, and bi-sexuality the flavour of the season.

There were staff members, mere time-servers, who slouched through the township, and residents wondered whether these teachers were vagabonds from another planet. Of course, there were also the dedicated teachers, such as Robert Sutton who constantly clashed with Betty Stevens on academic rigour at junior secondary level. Betty's husband was the principal of the Leongatha Technical School just next to the high school. Years later these two schools merged and Vic Roland assumed the principalship. Betty's husband became a relieving principal on account of his having misappropriated some school funds. However, he was never formally charged nor dismissed from the education department.

At the end of 1980 I was appointed to King's Park High School, a new 2-year-old school in the heart of Melbourne's western migrant suburb, St Albans. Maxwell Tomkins, its principal, celebrated his homosexuality to the full. Peter Arbusoff, a young, brilliant German, French and Russian teacher openly boasted about being Maxwell's current lover. A year later, when a new English teacher joined the staff and Maxwell had tired of Peter's company, Peter was in emotional turmoil. He made at least four suicide attempts before finally succeeding.

And the school principal continued to run the school as usual - there were the favourites and there were those out of favour with nothing in-between, except the Deputy Principal, Mr Noel Giacometti. This compassionate and understanding man did not flout his life-style the way Tompkins did.

When my family and I left for Nigeria to take up a lecturing position at the Minna State College, Maxwell delighted in the news that I had not been granted leave-without-pay. This was a blow to my plans, and so after unsuccessfully persuading then Director-General Dr Laurie Shears to grant me unpaid leave, I reluctantly resigned from the teaching service.

My departure from Kings Park became a contentious issue because Raymond McCraw requested from that school a statement about my competence. Noel Giacometti stated that I had helped junior teachers with their problems but that I had also left the school without permission at the end of Term II, 1981.

Dr Curry included this statement in his dismissal letter of 9 January 1985.

Maxwell Tompkins was removed from Kings Park early in 1990, after a massive teachers' union's push against him. His visit to then premier, Mrs Joan Kirner, and protection from former Minister for Education, Mr Robert Fordham, secured him a newly created position within the Ministry of Education: principal consultant for the creative and performing arts.

On Monday, 2 April 1990 Melbourne's *Herald* featured a brief report by education reporter Lawana Crimeen on the state of Tomkins' school:

Allen McNaughton's first hours at Kings Park Secondary College were spent in shock.
The relieving principal, with more than 30 years' experience, couldn't believe Victoria's biggests secondary school could be in such an appalling condition.
Mr McNaughton said today he believed it would take about $7 million or $8 million to fix the school's problems.
The Education Ministry had pledged money for improvements but "I have yet to see that translated into any action", he said.
Mr McNaughton replaced Mr Maxwell Tomkins - now the ministry's principal consultant for the creative and performing arts - as principal of the St Albans school in January. Teachers had made more than 250 allegations, including mismanagement, against Mr Tomkins.
At his new position, Mr McNaughton found 1339 students, more than 100 teachers, 61 broken windows, 75 portables lined up in depressing rows, graffiti-covered buildings and a burnt-out maths room.
Since then, 30 litres of paint have been used to cover the graffiti, trees have been planted and students and staff have cleaned up the grounds.
But the 11-year-old schools needs a lot more work - and money.
"We have done almost as much as we can from a self-help point of view," Mr McNaughton said.
"The ministry has verbally made a commitment to do something for us but we would like to see something more concrete than a mere statement."
The school is in a bad state. Spouting is scarce, down pipes run-water on to the ground, students have no lockers, the library is inadequate and Year 12 students are often forced to study in a rundown portable classroom.
Year 12 students Paul Szklarczyk and Louie Dimovske described the school as "a mess".
Louie said: "You would need a mint to fix it up.
"We deserve better than this."
But Mr McNaughton insists the school runs well. "It's a good staff and I've been most impressed by the educational acheivements," he said.
Recent improvements had reduced vandalism and students were responding to the improved environment.
A ministry spokesman said discussions about Kings Park had been going on for 18 months. He said plans included improving the school and building a $5 million secondary school at nearby Alban Meadows, which could operate as a second campus.

In March 1992 Mr Norman Geschke, then Victoria's Ombudsman, in reviewing aspects of my dismissal, looked at the allegation that I had left Kings Park without permission. Despite statements from Noel Giacometti, Andrew McNair, Andrew Webster and Bruce Runnals, clarifying the situation, the Ombudsman remained inactive. He did, however, tell me that Tompkins must have told lies to him about the circumstances surrounding my departure. That much he conceded but declined to push my case along.

The Ombudsman's letter to much-respected president of the Legislative Council and former Minister for Education A J Hunt says it all:

THE OMBUDSMAN
VICTORIA AUSTRALIA
& The Deputy Ombudsman (Police Complaints)
26 March 1992
The Hon A J Hunt MLC
President, Legislative Council
Parliament House
MELBOURNE VIC 3002
Dear Mr. Hunt,
Dr. Toben has written to me again and copied the letter to you. Before receiving that letter it was my intention to write to you saying that I had reached the view that there was nothing more I could do. I enclose a copy of my letter to Dr. Toben of the 18th of March and my letter of today's date following his letter of 23rd March.
It is possible that some of my comments in this letter are the result of getting a little tired of Dr. Toben, I do not really know of anything else that Ms. Day or I could do to reach a different conclusion. Each time he has written, his letters have been examined to see whether there was some new issue that had not been looked at before by this office.
If Dr. Curry had been receiving all the vibes that I have received in examining the Toben affair he would have reached the view that over a period of a number of years Dr. Toben did not endear himself to many that he worked with.
The other day in speaking to Mr. Tomkins, the Principal of Kings Park High School, after asking him some factual questions about the resignation at the end of Term 2, his statements:

- that he had heard from children that Dr. Toben may be leaving but he (Dr. Toben) had refused to confirm this;

- that he had questioned Dr. Toben about this but Dr. Toben refused to say what he was doing and had said that he was still a member of the ministry and would remain a member until ha had decided otherwise; and

- that when he (Mr. Tomkins) came back after a break he found that Dr. Toben had not returned and the school had to organize a replacement

I raised the issue of, notwithstanding the question of resignation, what was Dr. Toben's performance like? He said that Dr. Toben was strange "we would have a staff meeting and he would arrive and open a newspaper and read it during that staff meeting"; that on school but trips it was a requirement for teachers to travel with the children for supervisory purposes but Dr. Toben would take his own car.
I do not know nor have I attempted to determine whether these statements were right or not but it does seem that everybody I have spoken to raises issues of him being a difficult person to work with. If a person is as difficult as has been stated to me and as uncooperative with a Principal in terms of what he was doing in the next term,, I can understand fully why in the attempts of this office to investigate his complaint there is enormous difficulty in finding somebody who will support his case.
I have mentioned to you previously that Dr. Curry thought the interview with Dr. Toben had gone on for a few hours but Dr. Toben thought it had gone for 2 ½ hours and the opinion of another person present was that it had gone for over tow hours (I think this was the legal officer). Dr. Toben states that the hearing was a farce and the length of time is no indication of the fair nature of the hearing. I was not there and so I do not know but I am certain that if the hearing was just a formality and some form of whitewash Dr. Curry would not have spent so much time nor have made the offers he did as to the hearing.
The earlier reaction of my Investigation Officers was that in terms of Section 13(5) of the Ombudsman Act, I had no jurisdiction as there was no evidence that the procedures agreed by the Department and the Teaching Unions were unreasonable, had not been followed or had resulted in an injustice. I took the view that just in case this assessment was wrong, the whole matter should be re-examined by Ms. Day and the Ministry's files should be checked. Both she and I have regularly consulted during this subsequent review and I am now satisfied that I can do nothing further and that my conclusion that the Department has not acted unreasonably is a sustainable view on the evidence available.
Yours sincerely
Norman Geschke

It appears to me that the Ombudsman did not consider the following letters of support to be relevant to the issue.

Mr Noel Giacometti
18th December, 1991.
Dear Sir,
Dr Fredrick Toben has approached me regarding his departure from this school at the end of Term 2, 1981.
In a statement made by me on 13th July 1984, I wrote that "Dr Toben left the school without official notice at the end of Term 2 …." Meaning that to the best of my knowledge no written document of intention to leave existed within the school. I do not know whether the Principal had any verbal knowledge of Dr. Toben's intentions.
In so far as Dr Toben had been involved in the processes of applying for leave, and appealing against the refusal of leave, all this was unknown to me. This would not have been inconsistent with the practice of the Principal at that time, as is probably shown in Ministry records.

Of other events at the end of Term 2, 1981 I have no recollection, other than that Dr Toben did make a long speech at a staff meeting, delivered in mock heroic couplets. Its purpose was not clear at the time.
I am not prepared in any way to comment on the intentions, practices or procedures of any Support Group/s in which Dr Toben may or may not have been involved as I have no association with or knowledge of them.
Yours faithfully,
N. Giacometti
Deputy Principal
Kings Park Secondary College

Mr Andrew McNair
18 May 1992
Dear Sir,
I am writing to you in relation to Dr. G.F. Toben, a secondary teacher at Kings Park Secondary College in 1980 – 81.
I was Head of Department for the English faculty, of which Dr. Toben was a member. He informed me of his intention to take up a tertiary appointment in Nigeria after term 2, 1981. I was informed by him about the work his classes had done.
As an office bearer of the branch V.S.T.A I further advised Dr. Toben to seek extraordinary leave without pay instead of resigning, which was his intention. I have no further recollection of what transpired.
As a farewell gesture, the staff had drinks with Dr. Toben at the Keilor Hotel prior to his departure. Many staff members attended.
Yours Sincerely
W.A. McNair.
Kealba Secondary College

Mr Andrew Webster
25 May 1992
Dear Sir
I have been asked by Dr. Frederick Toben to write to you concerning his leaving King's Park High School in 1981. I am able to do this although my memory of it has been clouded somewhat by the passing of time.
As I recall the events it was my certain knowledge that Frederick was to leave the school on the last day of term. On the last day the staff met at the local hotel and gave Frederick the traditional send–off. My understanding was that he was to take up a position at a teachers' college somewhere in Africa.
I was the Daily Organizer in the school and I assumed that Frederick had filled in all the resignation or leave papers just as any teacher leaving would do. I was concerned that I would have to find a replacement teacher for Frederick in the first day and I was thinking about who I could employ. It never entered my mind that Frederick would be returning. All the other staff members were of a similar conviction and we gave Frederick a rousing send-off.
That is about all I can recall of his leaving.
Yours faithfully,
Andrew J. Webster
Coburn High School

Mr B A Runnalls
29th June, 1992.
Dear Sir,
I am writing this letter at the request of Mr Frederick Toben.
I was a teacher at Kings Park high School 1979 – 1985. In 1981 Mr Toben was employed as a teacher at the school. During this brief period of employment I can recall Fred having a number of "Run ins" with the Principal Mr Max Tomkin.
I recall that during 1981, Mr Toben was due to leave for Nigeria to take up employment. I cannot recall whether he had paid leave or not, but all staff, including myself knew of his desire to teach in that country. I assumed he put in for leave but whether that was granted I cannot tell you.
I also know that sometimes Mr Tomkin made some paper work such as applications difficult eg some senior teachers would obtain transfer forms from other school rather than go through the general office.
I do recall that around the time of his leaving Mr Toben recited his poem to Mr Tomkin at a staff meeting. Mr Tomkin was not amused.
Mr Toben left Australia and was replaced by another teacher. I assumed he would be able to get some leave as there seemed no shortage of replacement teachers.
Yours sincerely,
Mr. B.A. Runnalls.
Regional Catholic College Melton

Corrupt judge, Justice David Harper, likewise, did not take much notice of evidence these men gave before him during my defamation case in the Victorian Supreme Court in May 1993. He was too busy manipulating a way out of a clear-cut case of defamation for the Department's bureaucrats. After all, had he found in my favour, then - so according to a respectable intellectual who died just recently - the whole education system would come crashing down around us.

Wasn't that my intention rather than seek compensation? Indeed it was. The prospect of any monetary reward seemed irrelevant to my aim at doing something worthwhile for our students.

Thirty-Five Retirement - Transfer - Resignation - Dismissal

All teachers at some time or other dream of retiring from the profession with as much dignity as possible. To retire gracefully with a secure financial package is still a dream cherished by most. But I knew a colleague, David Drake-Feary, who said to be he did not care about the way he left the system so long as he had enough money to buy himself a small 5 a hectare block of land near Ballarat, thereon to grow 'grass', then to die disgracefully.

Then there are those in temporary 'power' positions who delight in destroying the life of an otherwise successful 30-odd year teaching career. A South Australian education bureaucrat informed me that this vicious attitude within the Victorian system must be the result of its convict legacy. South Australia's education bureaucracy certainly did not have to overcome any convict past. Later information from within the South Australian education system confirmed my suspicion that it, too, had that nasty streak within its ranks. What facilitated its emergence was the nonsense educational policy of 'sexual harassment and equal opportunity'. While admirable in itself, such concept as 'equality' became a terrible tool of power when used by educators who had lost the spark to inspire and had now become 'blood-suckers'.

GOROKE'S RETIREES

When McCraw arrived at Goroke in 1982, he carelessly spoke to people about the need to "get rid of deadwood". Such talk is attractive to those who lust for power over others. The idea to sack someone, the actual ability to terminate a person's livelihood, is still considered among the professionally insecure as a sign of power. Those persons who still cherish the Marxist view that 'process' is everything and any moral/ethical considerations are 'fascist fancies which need to be eliminated', fear to open themselves to the Kantian Categorical Imperative. Visually one may generalize and say that this imperative has a civilizing influence because the mind comes to a resting point from which it can mature. Within the dialectic process of the neo-Marxists it is not possible to mature into a whole person. The world is seen as a battlefield on which opposites fight it out to the bitter end - death.
How sad that Marx never understood the Hegelian dialectic process which has the thesis and the antithesis clashing to produce the synthesis wherein elements of both the former are preserved. Such preservation concept gives lie to the Marxian concept of revolution and its accompanying intellectual fraudulence.

Jess Batson, along with Audrey McLean and Joan Oliver, were considered to be 'deadwood' which had to be removed from the school.
In such instances, the Department's staffing section's response soon revealed the moral character of its officers.
The usual technique to induce 'retirement' was to pressure the teacher into sick-leave. From there it was usually no return. Favourable people, who knew too much about the way the education bureaucracy operated, were even promoted while on sick-leave, and then retired.

Jess Batson, became the principal of Kaniva Consolidated School, a position she never assumed though her superannuation fund continued to grow accordingly.
McCraw's laudatory remarks at Jess' basket-tea sounded sincere. Yet beneath that bearded face was the cynic who laughed at Jess' dedication, and the fact that he had successfully removed her from the school wherein she had taught three generations of Goroke's families. McCraw had again cannibalised those whom he praised.

The notice in Goroke's *Free Press* does not reveal all:

Ratirement of Miss Jessie S. Batson from Goroke Consolidated School
Many people in the Community may not know that Miss Batson has been promoted to Kaniva Consolidated School from next year on. Miss Batson is currently on sick leave and will probable be retired next year.
Jess was appointed to this school on 2/2/54 and has worked for 30 years in all sections of the school. She has taught most of the children who have passed through the school and many of you. She has been a tireless worker and enriched the lives of all who passed through her hands.
School council has decided to hold a function on Friday 23rd November to Farewell and Thank Miss Batson. It will take the form of a Basket tea and B.B.Q. available) beginning at 6.30 p.m. with a presentation afterwards.
All the Community are invited to attend this function at the School and express their appreciation to Miss Batson.
If you would care to make a donation towards the Presentation it can be sent along to School Marked 'Presentation – Miss Batson' or handed to the following Council Members – Alan Martin, Roger Gabbe, Lorraine Schuller, Edwin Mitchell, Ron Hawkins or Colin Stehn.

Audrey McLean's exit from the school also followed the one-year sick-leave period, almost as if this was a good way to be leaving one's life-long profession. Surely, in view of the quality of the younger teachers, it is a loss for any school to simply discard one's long-serving staff without ensuring there is an up-coming senior teachers group to replace them.

The trouble at Goroke was that these old educational sentinels could not tolerate so-called modern pedagogical babble. And so the old must go so as not to create conflict with the new but inexperienced principal. The changing of the guard thus occurs unceremoniously.

Some teachers within the system make their farewell a memorable occasion - as did Adrian Callinan of McLeod High School on 26 June 1984. He was allowed to speak his mind on this occasion - and he did it in style by presenting his views by writing his ***THE DECK OF CARDS - AN EDUCATION VERSION***

A gem from his literary endeavour is this one:

"When I see the King I think of Uncle Norman, our beloved Director General, the King of Education who is noted for his interpretations of the Conditions Agreement and who is tipped to be the next Co-Ordinator General of Education.".

TRANSFEREES WHO RESIGNED

Mr Mohamed Hegazi

Mr Hegazi's case was one of the first to use new Three Union Agreement. Bar the names therein, the 6 December, 1983, letter is an exact copy of the one I received a year later, on 28 September, 1984.

Mr Curtis went on sick-leave 'Work-Care'. He was given administrative jobs and his union comforted him. He wasn't given the treatment. Similarly Geoff French who was lucky enough to escape the clutches of McCraw's penchant for 'procedures'. Mr Hegazi was removed to the Correspondence School, from which he soon resigned, then was superannuated out of the Department.

What is more interesting is Jim Betson's letter of 28 November 1983, to the principal of Whittlesea Technical High School. Betson's displeasure of what was going on was initially surprising and supportive of Mr Hegazi. This then, for some unknown reason changed. However, when Betson's protégé, Chris Curtis, arrived at that school in 1988, it had consequences which were rather painful for Chris but which highlighted the deeper problems beset an education system in deep moral crisis. His letter to *The Age* of 24 May 1989, speaks for itself.

Curtis survived the crisis while Moslem Hegazi, faced with a Jewish principal, did not. Curtis was placed on sick-leave and his union extended all its support. Curtis was not given 'the treatment' but Hegazi was. He still finds it upsetting to talk about the procedure used to get him charged and transferred

Hegazi was removed from the school and placed in the Correspondence School. To this day he feels unjustly treated by those who wrote up the allegations. The fact that the head of the Department of Education's legal section is Jewish may not have influenced the application of the disciplinary procedures. That would spell out a 'conspiracy' - something so frowned upon by those who do nothing but conspire against others for the sake of a power-kick.
Although I had not met Mr Hegazi in 1987, he did contribute to the issue being aired in the *Mail-Times* by writing the following letter, which was never published:

Mr Peter Martin
Principal Stawell Secondary College
Stawell 3380
5 December 1987
Dear Mr Martin
I happen to read an old issue of the Mail-Times dated July 24, 1987. It included a letter to the Editor from yourself and the principal of Dimboola Memorial High School. it is quite apparent that one of you has written the letter and the other has acted as a mere rubber stamp. It would indeed be very difficult to distinguish between the writer and the rubber stamp since most secondary school principals do possess the rubbery characteristics necessary for their meaningless role.
I find it both amazing and disgusting that you should take part in the character assassination of a dedicated teacher, whose only crime has been the obvious fact that he took his work seriously. I tried to find a decent motive for your letter. It appears to me that the only motive is a natural tendency to 'suck up' to those who took the wrong decision of dismissing Mr Toben. they have the power and authority that enslaves the likes of you and kills in them the faculties of self respect and independent reasoning. You become a mere mouthpiece for your 'superiors'. You lose the very qualities that mr Toben managed to proudly maintain.
Finally, I have never met Mr Toben, but I have met many a fine teacher like him, who are needlessly suffering in our faulty system. I have seen your replicas in all th shallow school principals during my lengthy teaching career. I have seen enough of them to the extent that makes me wish that your orbit and mine may never cross or overlap.
Yours whatever,
M Hegazi
Greensborough 3088

Mrs Sophie Johnson
Sophie couldn't take it any more in the classroom and she joined the 6,000-odd teachers who were at any one time out on stress-related leave with pay. She had a year's rest from teaching under the Work Care legislation. Once the year was over, however, she had to fight her way back into the system. Together with her husband, Steven, they battled the bureaucracy, using the only language it understood - the legal sections of the Teaching Service Act and the Work-Care Act.

It was Steve Macpherson who had to weather Sophie's storm. He didn't mind that one bit because he could hold out longer than Sophie - and he knew this. She resigned from the service when she realized that the union agreement was designed to shed staff rather than to protect it.

There were also a number of other teachers who did not give up without fighting the rotten bureaucracy. Some, like Mark Gower, escaped the clutches of Rosalie Hood, et al, by immediately calling in a solicitor for help.

Still others, such as Richard Cherry, "got done in like a dinner' by the system's bureaucrats and he ventured into Australia's heartland for professional satisfaction.

DISMISSAL - or scape-goating?

The greatest shame and pain for any teacher is dismissal, especially if it is undeserved. In private industry, where white collar crime has greatly increased, it is not uncommon for guilty persons to commit suicide after exposure.

However, in a bureaucracy such as the education one, where competence is not really valued that much, to be dismissed on grounds of incompetence doubly hurts. For many victims the effect of such a dismissal is terminal for career and family unit.

In my own case, I was deprived of my livelihood at 40 when I had the peak decade of my professional work before me. To be cut down in one's prime is simply unfair. But what a scalp I was for an unsophisticated barely cultured and intellectually illiterate primary school principal.

Thanks to the Freedom of Information legislation which enabled me to access my personnel file, I know the names of the persons who made the dismissal decision.

Steve Macpherson
This man was the bureaucrat who gave the 'written order' to his superior, Jim Betson:

"In the light of the supplementary material presented by the enquiry panel (ref. Letter of 6 November 1984) I have no hesitation in recommending that Dr Toben be dismissed from the Teaching Service on the grounds of his incompetence as a teacher.
I note that Dr Toben is currently located at the Horsham Sub-Regional Office pending a decision on the enquiry panel recommendation."

And what was the "supplementary material" contained in Jim Clelland's 6 November 1984 letter to Jim Betson? It is a brief social comment:

"I had a message from the R.D.E. that you wanted more detail with regard to the enquiry into allegations against Dr Fredrick Toben of Goroke Consolidated School.
The situation at Goroke is apparently deteriorating. Any steps that could be taken to resolve the matter quickly would, I am sure, be for the general good of the school and the community."

Betson then gave the nod to Norman Curry who, in turn, conscientiously attempted to apply the badly flawed 3-Union Agreement.

Each of the commands leading to my dismissal was in a written form - and then there are intelligent people who wish to tell me that the alleged gassing operations at the Auschwitz concentration camp was set in motion without a written order from Hitler. It is explained by pointing out that Hitler's underlings had a desperate desire to please him. Hence, all Germans knew how virulently anti-Semitic Hitler was and they knew it would please Hitler immensely to see the homicidal gas chambers in operation.
Then again, any normally intelligent person would smell a rat here: How come there was 1. No order, 2. No plan, 3. No budget, 4. No murder weapon and 5. No body - autopsy? We are led to believe that millions of people were simply killed without any of the above factors operating. The population of cities such as Adelaide, Perth or Brisbane - just on one million - simply disappeared without a trace. The only evidence we have to 'prove' that gassings occurred is, as Faurisson says: "Words, Words, Words."

Any normal conflict issue is usually settled through mediation. This was not so in my case. My dismissal was a display of naked power - but it did not settle the problems besetting the Goroke school. Corruption was the order of the day and dismissals were designed for those who did not share the union culture. It was an open secret that I was a non-striking, non-union teacher!

Interestingly, Macpherson told me over the phone on 10 January, 1986, that he really didn't have anything to do with my dismissal:

"…because by the time I started being involved in the process I just described to you, your case was well and truly with the Director-General, and as you know, that was for an extended period. So, I wasn't directly involved in any procedures leading up to you being dismissed. I'd come into the position prior to you being dismissed but it was well and truly in his hands by that time."

And yet he was the one who had recommended my dismissal to his superior, Jim Betson!

And so Steven Macpherson, the co-author of the Three Union Agreement, continues to work within the Education bureaucracy to this day - 1998.

Power from above usually settles a local dust-up. My dismissal from the education system was a display of power – but it did not settle the problems at Goroke. McCraw's, Clelland's and Macpherson's hopes were dashed.

Ironically, in a *Bulletin* article of 30 June 1987, Macpherson is quoted as saying: "…it's not a fair world…Toben was not the worst teacher in the system and there are hundreds who are the same …Toben may have been unlucky."

The following did not please the Victorian education bureaucracy and Education Minister, Ian Cathie, stated to my local member, Bill McGrath, that "Toben will never be employed because of *The Bulletin* article.

EDUCATION Case of the teacher who wasn't kept in By TONY ABBOTT, 30 June 1987

DOCTOR Frederick Toben has achieved what many thought impossible. He has been sacked for "incompetence" as a teacher in an Australian school.

Despite the quoted desire of NSW Education Minister Rod Cavalier to weed out ""malingerers in the staff room'' dismissal is not a treat our teachers normally face. Educators contacted by *The Bulletin* said that any dismissal was rare and dismissal for alleged incompetence almost unknown. The picture which emerges is of teaching authorities who take a benign, almost parental, view of their employees' failings.

Most teacher dismissals follow significant criminal convictions. Others occur only after the failure of an elaborate counselling process. In Australian schools, complaints against teachers are normally handled by principals. If not resolved they are referred to the department of education.

The Victorian Ministry of Education, which employs 55,000 teachers, dismisses "three or four" for incompetence each year – usually when "an element of senility" is involved. An official of a Catholic education office in Victoria, employing about 1000 teachers, said that he had "never written a letter of dismissal".

As a spokesman for the NSW Education Department – which employs nearly 48,000 teachers and has dismissed "a very few" – put it: "if someone has successfully passed teachers college, there are usually personal reasons for sub-standard performance…Quite often, with a particular group, a person may not feel comfortable…We would usually transfer such a person to another school where there was more motivation and security…"

Only when subsequent inspection shows no improvement and when a teacher declines to resign, may formal disciplinary proceedings be instituted – possibly leading to dismissal. Most teachers resign at this point. Frederick Toben stubbornly refused because he had done nothing wrong.

Toben's troubles began in 1983 when the Goroke consolidated School principal, Ray McCraw, withdrew approval for his permanency application. McCraw said that Toben's classes had deteriorated.

Toben said that McCraw felt threatened by his qualifications – Arts degrees from Melbourne and Wellington universities, a doctorate from Stuttgart University and 17 years' teaching experience in Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Nigeria and Zimbabwe.

Goroke is in far western Victoria. In a small town, small school atmosphere, rumours spread that McCraw was unhappy with Toben. He became something of an outcast in the staff-room,. Some pupils began to disrupt his classes. Victoria – unlike other states – has no provision for formal inspection of teachers thought to be unsatisfactory. Toben asked several times for inspection. Instead, in mid-1984, a "support group" was set up. It comprised McCraw and three other teachers as well as Toben's nominee, fellow teacher Glenn Duncan. After four weeks' observation the group agreed that Toben's classes were unruly and that his teaching methods were inappropriate.

Duncan – who signed the group's report with some reservations – recently told *The Bulletin* that Toben "didn't rally get a fair go" and that his problems were the result of a "personality clash' with McCraw, compounded by philosophical differences, which had gradually infected the whole school.

Next, a formal inquiry was held in October 1984. It was conducted jointly by a union official and a senior officer of the Victorian Ministry of Education who wrote to Toben beforehand saying that the inquiry was "fact-finding, rather than fundamental". Despite this, the inquiry endorsed the support groups assessment and expressed a "strong preference" that Toben be "dismissed from the teaching service".

Toben's case was finally heard by the then Director-General of Victorian education, Dr Norman Curry. According to Toben - and this has not been denied by the Ministry – Curry said: "Give me a good reason why I should not act on the inquiry's recommendation that you be dismissed."

Normally, these hearings are quasi-judicial – both sides call and question witnesses. In this case, Currie questioned Toben and four of his supporters but Toben did not have a chance to question McCraw. Toben was not represented. On February 4, 1985, Currie informed Toben that he had been dismissed for "incompetence".

Since then, Toben – who now drives a school bus – has been trying to re-enter the teaching profession. The ministry has said that it will reemploy him after "evidence of successful teaching". But no school, so far, has been prepared to take him on. The Ombudsman has refused to investigate without evidence of "clear injustice". That, however, is precisely what Toben hoped an investigation would determine.

Toben's former union, the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association, told *The Bulletin* that correct procedures had been observed in his case as far as it was concerned.

A senior state educator, who requested anonymity, admitted that "…it's not a fair world … Toben was not the worst teacher in the system and there are hundreds who are the same…Toben may have been unlucky …"

Bad luck or injustice? Professor Lauchlan Chipman, of Wollongong University, said that "even awkward and unpopular people have rights". He said Toben's case "typified the fate of the one-off model in Australia".

While school authorities are making determined efforts to lift teaching performance and elaborate procedures are in place to ensure that this does not occur at the expense of teachers' rights, it would be ironic if one of the few sacked for incompetence turned out not to have deserved it.

So, in 1987 "It's not a fair world…" according to Macpherson who, on 27 November 1984, had "no hesitation in recommending that Dr Toben be dismissed from the Teaching Service on the grounds of his incompetence as a teacher", thereby destroying my family and career.

Is this why Macpherson did not mention, in a Ministerial briefing of 15 December 1987, the letter of allegations of 13 December 1984, nor the 7 January 1985 formal hearing? These letters raise the issue of bureaucratic corruption as I proved in my County Court case of 1988-9.

Is it any wonder that this bureaucratic corruption was not highlighted by Macpherson, then principal industrial relations officer, when he wrote a Ministerial background report on my dismissal to Ms S Shapiro, a ministerial advisor to the Minister of Education.
I consider this to be an example of Macpherson 'shifting ground', a euphemism for lying!

MS. S. SHAPIRO – MINISTERIAL ADVISOR
S. J. MACPHERSON – A/GROUP MANAGER, EMPLOYEE RELATIONS BRIEF BACKGROUND TO DISMISSAL OF DR. G.F. TOBEN
15.12.1987

Dr. G.F. Toben was transferred as a temporary teacher to Goroke consolidated School on 1st February, 1983.
His application for permanency was initially supported in June 1983 by the Principal, Mr. R.A. McCraw, but this support was withdrawn in August 1983 as a result of Dr. Toben's deteriorating teaching practice.
On 2nd July, 1984 Mr. McGraw informed Dr. Toben, in writing, of his concerns regarding classroom discipline and management, communication skills, relationships with students, student education techniques and teaching methods. Dr. Toben was invited to meet with him to respond to these concerns. Mr. McGraw provided Dr. Toben with the Agreement which outlines discipline procedures.
On 6th July, 1984 a Support Group was initiated and met during July and August.
The Support Group decision was made to "discontinue the support role, as there have been no significant changes in Dr. Toben's observable teaching techniques, skills, or relationships with children or staff. This decision was unanimous. "… Dr. Toben has reflected the advice and support role of the group".
A formal statement of complaint was lodged by Mr. McGraw against Dr. Toben on 9th August, 1984 and requested that the director of Personnel and Industrial Relations implement discipline procedures as per Section 3.2.5 of the Agreement.
The Director of Personnel & Industrial Relations, Mr. J. Betson, contacted J. Clelland, A.R.D.E., Central Highlands-Wimmera Region regarding procedures on 28th September, 1987 and informed him that an official enquiry would be held on 11th October, 1987 into allegations regarding Dr. Toben's conduct.
The panel found that the majority of facts supported that Dr. Toben was incompetent in all of the following areas:

- classroom discipline and management;
- communication skills;
- relationships with students and other staff;
- evaluation of students;

- teaching methods.

The Panel also found that Dr. Toben distorted that truth on numerous occasions.

The Panel recommended that the Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations take further action.

On 8th November, 1984 Dr. K. Boston, Regional Director, Central Highlands Wimmera Region, wrote to Dr. Toben and directed him to report for duty at Horsham Education Office pending a decision on the Report of the Enquiry.

On 26th November, 1984 Dr. N. Curry, Director-General, informed Dr. Toben that he would not be re-appointed to Goroke Consolidated School.

[Here is missing the reference to the 13 December 1983 letter of allegations from Dr Norman Currie and the 7 January 1985 formal hearing in his office.]

On 9th January, 1985 Dr. Curry informed Dr. Toben that his services would be dispensed with from 4th February, 1985 on the grounds established by the enquiry and from consideration of reports from previous schools, St. Arnaud and Kings Park High Schools, where Dr. Toben had taught between 1980-1983.

Procedures adopted by the Ministry of Education in the dismissal of Dr. Toben were in accordance with the Teachers' Federation of Victoria Agreement on Discipline and Dismissal Procedures for teachers.

S.J. MACPHERSON

Noted

MINISTERIAL ADVISER : Ms. S. SHAPIRO

Peter Ford - VSTA

This VSTA assistant secretary didn't enjoy my 29 November 1985 conversation with him. He simply told me that I wasn't a member anymore and "correct procedures" had been followed throughout my dismissal.

Here is an insight into the mind of a union functionary:

Telephone Conversation with VSTA's Assistant Sec Peter Ford Friday 29 November 1985 – 2pm

T: I received your letter of the 26th and it rather disturbs me that you feel that the VSTA's had an extensive discussion with me on this matter – I don't think it has – but, bearing that in mind, I just wondered whether, because of Justice Murphy's re-trial, I would have an opportunity of having my case looked at.

F: Well, all I can say to you, Fred, is that the Executive – I wrote that letter at the direction of our VSTA Executive. The VSTA Executive is no longer prepared to pursue any of the matters raised. You're no longer a member, we believe you were given the service that was accorded to you at the time and as that matter has now resolved itself, the VSTA is not prepared to advise you, support you, represent you in any subsequent under-takings which you might care to get into.

T: I see.

F: That is a fair decision of the Executive.

T: I see – that is interesting, isn't it? Who is the Executive – can I have a list of the names – would you please send me a list?

F: Well, I can't, Fred, you don't understand. I shouldn't even be talking to you. The Executive has made a decision that we are …all matters pertaining to your case are finalised and finished and that's it.

T: I see. Finalised and that's it – just like that?

F: Well, not just like that. It's obviously been going on for a substantial period of time and you clearly have had concerns which you continue to raise. The Executive has decided that they can no longer afford to use the resources of the VSTA to discuss with you or support any other matters which you might want to now raise.

T: O.K. Could you put me on to Bernadette, please?

F: well, no, Fred, I just said I can't use any of the resources of the VSTA. I'm speaking to you now as a courtesy. But that's the last time I'll be able to do that.

T: Yes..

F: O.K.?

T: I see – just put me on to Bernadette?

F: Well, I just explained that I cannot do that and will not do that and I'll leave instructions at the switch that if you were to ring in, then I simply cannot afford to have any member of staff, Bernadette or anybody else, contact you.

T: Do you realise that you're black-banning me?

F: I'm not black-banning you. You're no longer a member of the VSTA. Our constitution provides for us to service the membership. You are asking for the use of those resources simply by even talking to us.

T: Even talking to you?

F: Well, that is a use of a resource, while I'm talking to you, Fred. There are other members who're wanting to talk to me.

T: What was my membership worth, then, while I was…

F: Well, Fred, these are the matters you had…

T: I'm professionally destroyed…
F: I don't want to be rude, Fred, but if you're going to pursue this line I'm simply going to have to hang up.
T: Will you?
F: I certainly will!
T: Could you please give a message then to Bernadette?
F: Well, I'm not giving a message to anybody.
T: Just hang on, just hang on Peter! Could you please give her a message then, and just tell her to return the material that I sent Brian. There are certain items that I would like returned.
F: Well, that's a fair request, what is it?
T: Absolutely fair, my word.
F: that's fine and I don't want to offend you in any way but…
T: Oh, not at all…
F: If you could enumerate what those documents are.
T: She'll know.
F: Well, when was the material sent?
T: Sorry?
F: When was the material sent?
T: She is aware of that so I don't have to say any more. I don't want to burden you with anything, Peter. Thanks very much for your assistance.
F: Thank you.

After my case had been aired in the County Court, Ford made a statement to the *Mail-Times*, on 10 February 1989 wherein he "re-instates" me as a union member. Why this about-turn?

Toben reinstated in teacher union

Dr Frederick Toben is reinstated as a member of the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association. He automatically lost his membership on February 4, 1985, when the Education Ministry wrongly sacked him.

VSTA deputy secretary Peter Ford who 'phoned the Mail-Times yesterday to announce Dr Toben's reinstatement said: "**I wish to state categorically that the County Court judgment enables him to resume any teaching position in the state. As well we'll be supporting him as best we can. I hope he can get a teaching position very quickly."**

Dr Toben's long and better legal battle with the Education Ministry is due to end at Melbourne County Court today. The court will announce how much back pay the ministry owes Dr Toben and the tax he should pay.

Unlawful

On January 27 this year the court declared Dr Toben's dismissal from Goroke Consolidated School unlawful and void. The ministry had charged him with incompetence and disobedience.

Dr Toben said last night he was awaiting appointment to a secondary school in Victoria. He had asked the Education Ministry's chief executive officer Anne Morrow for a position. Dr Toben said he was happy with his reinstatement as a member of the VSTA.

He said: "No, the association won't be charging me back dues for the period since my dismissal. The court ruled that I was always a teacher, that my employment as a teacher had never stopped. Loss of my VSTA membership was automatic. The association did nothing for me during my long struggle."

Dr Toben said association deputy secretary Mr Ford had been unable to explain why the VSTA failed to support him at a hearing by then Director-General of Education, Dr Norman Curry, in Melbourne on January 7, 1985.

Dr Curry formally 'dismissed' Dr Toben soon after, on February 4.

Ford and the union movement was lucky in that Judge Strong of the County Court had made "an error in judgement". What was initially a re-instatement and four years' back-pay became a one years back-pay and no re-instatement. I had lost my job by "an effluxion" because contrary to accepted custom, I was a temporary teacher, and all temporary teachers - according to Judge Strong - need to have their yearly contract renewed. Mine simply lapsed!

Again the union was off the hook and the Agreement saved from closer scrutiny. On 26 February 1989 *The Sunday Press* asked Ford to comment on these developments - which he did candidly. Soon after he left to join Senator Susan Ryan at API. He had had enough of the union business and he told me privately that he hoped that Ministry would stop using the Agreement procedures to get rid of staff.

Winner in a no-win situation By ROSS BRUNDRETT

IN the County Court, Dr Fredrick Toben wept openly. Tears of relief, if not joy. He had just won his four-year fight against the Education Department, won back his reputation as a secondary teacher, won back his dignity. Or so he thought…

But those tears of relief have been replaced by cries of despair.

Less than a month after his courtroom "victory". Dr Toben is worse off than he has ever been. He has no job, no money and no prospects. For the past four years the man with two Arts degrees and a doctorate in English Literature and Philosophy has been Australia's most over qualified bus driver. Now he is just another over-qualified bloke in the dole queue. He quit his job as a bus driver because he thought the court decision meant that he would once more be able to ho back to the job he loved, teaching.

But the Ministry of Education had other ideas. It says the court ruling will not affect its stand on the issue. "The Ministry of Education does not propose to re-employ Dr Toben." Said a spokesperson.

Said a devastated Dr Toben: "I don't know what to think…I don't know if I've got a future. "I'd like to know who made this decision…I'd like the chance to present my case."

Cut back

Dr Toben's expected pay-out of nearly $64,000 from the court case was reduced to $16,745 after Judge Strong in the County Court decided he had erred in his earlier judgement and had decided that Dr Toben's temporary status as a teacher meant he was no longer employed by the Education Ministry and did not qualify for the full amount of wage arrears. The reduced amount of money will soon disappear paying bills, says Dr Toben.

"I've been told there won't be much left after legal costs, but the money isn't the main thing…" More than anything else Dr Toben wants to teach again, says he needs to teach again. But the court ruling means his teaching appointment with the Education Ministry ended in 1985 (the year of his dismissal for alleged incompetence at Goroke Consolidated School in north-west Victoria) even though his dismissal was ruled void and invalid by the court.

The court said that since Dr Toben's contract as a temporary teacher hadn't been renewed in 1986, he was no longer employed after the completion of the 1985 school year. Since the ruling, Dr Toben said the Education Ministry had met his request for work with stony silence.

"That really threw me. I had pinned everything around working again as a teacher – to me that was the most important thing," he said.

The Ministry argues the court judgement agreed Dr Toben was given a "sufficient hearing" on charges of incompetence, but not on allegations of disobedience.

But, as Dr Toben pointed out, Judge Strong, however, made a point of saying in summary that he would not make any judgement regarding incompetence. He said his judgement was purely based on procedural matters.

Peter Ford, an officer with the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association, said the union's solicitors would look at the final judgement before deciding whether to support Dr Toben in his stand.

"Technically-speaking, Dr Toben hasn't been a member of the union since his dismissal in 1985, but if this ruling affects the wider interests of the union then we might well act on it." Mr Ford said he was unaware of any requirements for temporary teachers to re-sign contracts every year. Teachers usually continued teaching for as long as it was mutually convenient.

'Excuses'

But at the same time Mr Ford was not enthusiastic about Dr Toben's chances of being re-employed as a teacher in Victoria.

"Dr Toben has publicly criticised the Ministry, teaching philosophies, even this union. I don't think the Ministry will ever re-hire him … I think they'll always find excused."

Dr Toben took the news fairly calmly.

"I got the same response when I wanted to take the matter to the courts. The legal fraternity said I'd no hope but I won in the end."

This time it will be tougher. His part-time job as a bus driver on the school round in Goroke was snapped up as soon as he quit. "That's gone and there's nothing else around. I had no option but to apply for the dole…and the shame of being on unemployment further dents my pride. I can tell you, I'm getting very disillusioned with the system!"

That could qualify for the understatement of the decade. Dr Toben, who insists he should never have been dismissed in the first place, has been fighting long and hard for what he calls "justice". For the past four years he has endured it all. He stayed on in the township of Goroke even after his dismissal, saying he wouldn't leave until his name had been cleared.

He endured taunts from some students, financial stress, the break-up of his marriage. He wrote to Education Department officials, union officials, private education institutions, Legal Aid, parliamentarians, the state Ombudsman, media, pleading his case. It took the court to give him new hope, and just as quickly, he says, take it away again. He is loath to take up a job in a private school. "That would seem to me like dodging the issue, I want to stay in the state school system. I believe that my criticisms of the system have not been harsh."

Should the Education Ministry not relent and offer him a job, Dr Toben has only two options if he wants to continue teaching: move interstate or apply to a private school.

"At the moment I'm asking why should I have to leave. It makes it sound like I've lost when I thought I had won."

Sophie Johnson's letter to the editor of the *Mail-Times*, 5th August, 1987 criticises the bureaucracy whom she confronted head-on a year later.

Oh, so droll

SIR, - The drollest things happen in large bureaucracies.

Tony Abbott, Bulletin, June 6, came upon a lovely on in the Ministry of Education. A primary teacher 'discovered' that Dr Fredrick Toben, a secondary teacher of long and international experience and holder of impressive academic qualifications, is incompetent.

How intrepid! I'm put in mind of my little Australian terrier which once seriously challenged a great dane. I wonder whether the regional director was as shamefaced about this escapade as I a was about my silly little dog's?

But it's not all laugh, of course. Dr Toben was dismissed. And I have approached very likely point in the Ministry of Education and in the Victorian Secondary Teachers' Association to find out why. But nobody is prepared to utter a word on the subject.

Has there been any demand from Dr Toben's community for an explanation of his unlikely dismissal? And the regional director: Has he anything to do with the inept smokescreen that the principals, Mr P. J. Martin and Mr C. Ekinsmyth put in your columns, July 24.

Nobody's incompetence principals dear, becomes apparent for reasons only that lumpenbureaucrats have closed ranks and are refusing to talk.

Incidentally, Ludwig Wittgenstein once taught in a village school. His principal was very proud of him. But what's the betting he too would have been found incompetent at Goroke?

Sophie Johnson
Secondary teacher, Ministry of Education,
43 Bowen St
Camberwell.

Ken Boston

Dr Curry's letter to the Goroke staff, 13 November 1984, responding to their telegram of 7 November 1984, indicates to me that Boston was very well versed with the Goroke situation. He wanted the matter to be settled quickly – and the best way of doing that was by eliminating the perceived cause of all the trouble – namely me!

13 November 1984
The Staff
Goroke Consolidated School
Goroke VIC 3412
Dear Colleagues
I refer to your telegram concerning Dr G F Toben.
I have discussed the matter with the Regional Director who visited the school last week. I understand from him that he has temporarily withdrawn Dr Toben from the school until the report of the Enquiry has been considered.
Yours sincerely
Norman G Curry
Director-General of Education

On 27 March, 1985, Boston gave a clear assurance to the *Mail-Times* that correct procedures had been used in my dismissal. He should know!

Maurice Lawson, of the *Mail-Times*, asked Boston: "Is it a fact that a secondary teacher at Goroke Consolidated School was dismissed, and for what reason?"
Boston: "Yes, he was dismissed for incompetence."
Lawson: "Was there an inquiry and did all the events leading to the dismissal follow precisely the procedure laid down by the Education Department?"
Boston: "Yes, as laid down by agreement between the department and the Victorian Secondary Teachers' Association, Technical Teachers' Union of Victoria and the Victorian Teachers' Union."
Lawson: Were there steps to settle the dispute or problem at school level?"
Boston: "Yes, as set down in procedure which provides for special support to help a teacher overcome any problem, any difficulty. The system seeks to help a teacher develop good teaching methods. It's only when all else has failed that the question goes to department inquiry. The subsequent inquiry was a member of the VSTA and the department's assistant regional director in Horsham, Mr Jim Clelland."
Lawson: "The ultimate decision for dismissal came from Dr Norman Curry in Melbourne?"
Boston: "Yes, on February 4 this year. On the basis of the teacher's previous record the only appropriate response was dismissal."
Lawson: "You are aware no doubt of a division in the Goroke community over events at the school?"

Boston: "Yes, I would say the school experienced some difficulties during the period of the inquiry, but my sincere hope is that any problems have now been overcome."
Lawson: "Are you aware of suggestions of a deliberate attempt to downgrade the status of the Goroke school?"
Boston: "No, but of course that's out of the question. I have absolute faith in the future of the school. It's essential to primary and post primary education in the West Wimmera. The Education Department's prime object is to support and maintain the school. It's isolation alone makes it a distinct and viable education unit. As for staff, it's right on establishment with no shortage of teachers…I have a particular feeling for the school because I opened its new facilities in February last year. It was the first school I opened." An education centenary is a wonderful occasion and we look forward with confidence to another successful 100 years."

Lawson ended his article with the following comment: "Goroke Consolidated School has 83 primary pupils and a staff of six, and 60 secondary students with a staff of 11."

Six years later, as Director-General of Education in South Australia, Ken Boston again reacted quickly. This time he caught Max Smith, principal of Pandana School on Kangaroo Island.

The Adelaide *Advertiser* of 3 July 1991 editorialised the matter thus:

Bureaucrats out of touch

There is a world outside the Flinders Street headquarters of the Department of Education. The isolated bureaucrats are especially in danger of being the arm of bad government when they forget this and tamper with the sensitivities of small communities, such as they have done with Parndana on Kangaroo Island.

The story goes that Parndana Area School principal Max Smith was involved in some fisticuffs with a teenager in private time on private property about 14 months ago. All was forgiven and forgotten, apparently, although at least one resident remembered and the matter came to the ears of the Flinders St bureaucrats.

Last Friday, Mr Smith was demoted for what education director-general Ken Boston called "disgraceful and improper behaviour" under the Education Act. The Supreme Court reinstated Mr Smith yesterday pending a hearing by the Teachers Appeal Board.

If Mr Smith, as a community role model, was indeed engaged in violence it would have been disgraceful; but against this view must be set the feelings of the local community. The long-serving Mr Smith obviously has some popular support, however tasteless this may seem to Flinders Street.

Members of the school's Parent Action Group threatened to withdraw their children in protest at his demotion. And it is ultimately their school, not Dr Boston's.

However well-meaning the bureaucrats in their social engineering, they cannot afford to get too far out of touch with the community they exist to serve - even if it is a rural community a long way from Flinders St.

The Teachers Appeal Board found in Smith's favour.

Four months later, Dr Boston resigned from his five-year contract position which *The Advertiser* reported on 8 November 1991:

Boston quits as boss of SA schools

South Australia's controversial director-general of education, Dr Ken Boston, resigned yesterday to take an interstate job worth up to $184,500 a year. He will become the head of the embattled NSW Department of School Education next year.

Dr Boston who presided over massive budget cuts and industrial unrest during his 3½ years in SA, refused to discuss the new salary package yesterday but said his decision was based on the need for a bigger challenge.

Dr Boston, who has a reputation for being a tough boss, has reorganised top-level management and forced through school closures and amalgamations. He has also faced industrial disputes over pay and award restructuring and ruled over extensive staffing cuts.

Dr Boston said his major achievements after joining the ministry in 1988 included producing a "clearer" planning focus, a "clear" vision for education and establishing the Education Review Unit.

The Opposition education spokesman, Mr Rob Lucas, said Dr Boston's present salary was about $100,000.

One teacher within the SA system had the courage to put pen to paper, and *The Advertiser* published his letter on 16 November 1991:

'Vision' splendid.

As a teacher in the State school system, I can only wonder why the Director-General of Education, Dr Ken Boston, has felt a need to resign to take up a comparable position in New South Wales.

Undoubtedly he has commanded the ship through a period of great educational change. There have been great reductions in teacher numbers and great increases in student/teacher ratios.
His commission has been characterised by greater interference by centralised bureaucracy and even greater levels of despondency and alienation among the teaching fraternity.
We have been labelled as unprofessional, unproductive and teachers of "crap" by Education Department officials, who should know better and who show themselves to be more out of touch than those they condemn.
Unfortunately, Mr Boston is departing before his "vision" splendid is fulfilled in SA schools.
One must hope that our colleagues in NSW have the good sense to conduct a mutiny before they are subjected to the same fate.
Ken Gregory, Peterborough

Another person, K Reynolds of Mr Pleasant stated in a letter to *The Advertiser* on 24 January 1992, that it was
"*...Dr Boston who managed to devastate the education services in this State before moving on to greener pastures."*

Boston ran true to form in New South Wales where in 1993 he moved against the most senior principal within that state's education system, Mr Norman Robinson, principal of Lismore High School. Why? Mr Robinson had been outspoken during his December 1992 Speechnight address - and we know that Boston does not tolerate any criticism.

When Mr Robinson returned from his Christmas holiday break he could not open his school office. The locks had been changed and he was placed under investigation.

Fortunately for Mr Robinson, his school and town community, and union, came to the rescue. In order to get out of a most undesirable situation, Boston sacrificed his mate Robin Chapman who was the regional director in that area carrying out Boston's orders. It did not help Chapman to recall that Boston had been best man at his wedding. Likewise, it did not help me during my marital crisis to recall that Glenn Duncan was my son's Godfather when he moved against me and subsequently became my wife's new husband.

Boston again survived - as he did my defamation action against him in the same year. Corrupt judge, David Harper, found Boston merely carried out his bureaucratic duties. By this is implied that Boston is a servant who does not really have a will of his own. Tell that to those sick Nazi-hunters who brush aside the defence "I was carrying out orders".

On 5 March 1997 I made a submission to the **Royal Commission Into The NSW Police Service** which had invited Boston before it to explain how known paedophile teachers managed to survive within his education system. Some, when caught, were even given good references, then sent on their way into other teaching services.

My submission consisted of my booklet: *Political Correctness In Our Schools*, 1995, ISBN 0 646 26799 X, wherein I refer to McCraw's paedophile activity which Boston knew about. G W Crooke, QC, Senior Counsel Assisting the Commissioner thanked me for my contribution. Again Boston escaped any form of censor because he is a bureaucrat who merely carries out the politicians' orders!

Thirty-Six Moral and Intellectual Courage Amid Deceit and Cowardice

When Cambridge University philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, invited colleague Karl Popper to address one of his seminars, the unexpected occurred. Wittgenstein introduced Popper by stating that "If only we correctly analyze our language, then all our problems will disappear."

Popper challenged: "What about our moral problems?"

Wittgenstein, standing next to a fire place, picked up a fire poker and menacingly waved it at Popper: "There are no moral problems!"

Popper responded: "What about the moral problem arising from the act of a host threatening a visitor with a fire poker?"

Wittgenstein stormed out the room.

The Wittgenstein legacy is very much with us to this day. Biographer Ray Monk denies the import of the Wittgenstein-Popper clash but fails to explain how he can claim that Wittgenstein spent his life-time working on the problem as to what constitutes an ethical life.

Political commentators inadvertently slip into the moral domain, then, as if having committed some great sacrilege, they fall back on the excuse that some act is merely 'technically' corrupt. NSW Premier, Nick Greiner, was found to be 'technically' corrupt' for appointing independent politician and former colleague, Dr Metherell, to a comfortable state public servant's position.

US president, Bill Clinton, has as yet not been judged to be morally corrupt - the oral office and all that - because his private life is not deemed to be of anybody's concern. He may still be brought down for having lied to Congress. And there I was a teacher attempting to set an example to my students!

Interestingly, all hell broke loose as an Australian parliamentarian said under parliamentary privilege that the former leader of the Australian democrats, Cheryl Kirno, who defected to the Labor Party because of increased chances of becoming Australia's first female prime minister, had the "morals of an alley cat", referring to her having had an affair with a student while she was a teacher.
Let us hope that owing to the fact that the word 'moral' has been introduced into parliament we may expect some kind of betterment coming from that house so that ordinary Australians may regain trust in their politicians.

It is also conveniently forgotten that our common law heritage demands of us all to balance our legal, social and moral duties!

The Media Rescue?

After airing my dismissal in March 1985 the *Wimmera Mail-Times* again devoted some space to it in July-August 1987.

The *Sunday Press* sent journalist Jane Symons and photographer Mike Martin to Goroke and on 15 April 1986 ran a full-page story:

Teacher on a dead end road

Dr Fredrick Toben has taught at schools around the world - but, according to the Education Department, he's not "competent" to teach Victorian school children. Now he's probably Australia's only school bus driver with a PhD.

"It's a waste of resources," he says. There's a shortage of teachers who are willing to work in the country and vacancies at many schools." I want to live and work in the country, and I believe I have something to offer. But I'm driving a bus."

Dr Toben has an impressive educational background. After gaining a bachelor of arts degree at Melbourne and Wellington Universities he taught in New Zealand for two years. He then travelled to Stuttgart in West Germany where he taught at the respected Merz private school. He tutored in philosophy for three years at Stuttgart University while studying for his PhD in English literature and philosophy.

Impressive

Dr Toben then moved to Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, where he tutored in a private college within Salisbury University. He tutored in a private college within Salisbury University. During that time he completed a graduate certificate in education - a teaching qualification recognised by the Victorian Department. In a reference from the University of Zimbabwe, Professor N. D. Atkinson writes of Dr Toben's "well reasoned ideas on education and schooling." The professor continued: "His performance in the classroom was always very impressive." The reference concludes: "I believe Mr Toben to be a man of high principles and exemplary character."

Dr Toben returned to Australia with his Zimbabwean wife, Georgina, and took up a limited-tenure teaching position at Leongatha and Kings Park high schools. He again left to take up a job lecturing at a teachers' training college in Nigeria.

But when he returned, his problems with the Education Department began. Dr Toben moved to the small Wimmera wheat town of Goroke and a temporary teaching appointment at the combined primary and secondary school. Initially all went well and the school principal even asked Dr Toben to help a new teacher. Dr Toben turned the school public address system into a radio station and helped students compile an illustrated story book. He applied for a permanent position with the Education Department and says he was told he would have the support of the principal. Four weeks later, Dr Toben says the permanency application was withdrawn by the school principal.

"I couldn't make sense of the logic behind such actions," Dr Toben says. He believes the crux of the problem was his attitude to discipline and literacy. "I believe in discipline at school." he says. "Absolutely. Yes. No achievement is gained without discipline. "I wasn't popular with students but in retrospect, they appreciated it."

Dr Toben says colleagues began to disrupt his classes with "trivial" queries and openly ridiculed him when he introduced 15-year-old year nine students to Shakespeare. Nothing's a secret in a small town and Dr Toben says students began to goad him about his teaching methods and German ancestry. He says one student mocked him with cries of, "Poof, poof" and, "Hitler, Hitler."

"I tried to explain to her that by labelling people you're not understanding them. "I asked her: 'Would you like it if I went around the town saying you were a lesbian?'" Dr Toben says. The student lodged a complaint with the principal claiming Dr Toben had said she was a lesbian. This, he says, is one of the incidents that led to his dismissal.

In another incident, Dr Toben says he mimicked a student who he claims boasted that he was on the school council he could have Dr Toben sacked.

Deposed

The situation deteriorated to the point where a support group was established to help Dr Toben with his "massive teaching problems". The group consisted of teachers Dr Toben says were openly antagonistic towards him.

One member of the "support group" signed a restaurant visiting book giving his address as Goroke - "Teacher dismissal country and school council presidents deposed at your leisure!" The majority report of the "support group" found that Dr Toben was "incompetent".

Dr Toben first learned of the decision and his imminent dismissal from a student. "One of the students asked me why I was losing my classes. That was the first I knew about it. The following day my year 9 and 10 English classes were taken away from me."

Dr Toben appealed the "support group's" finding that he was incompetent and pleaded with the Education Department to appoint independent, qualified and most importantly, external assessors to judge his case. The request has been refused repeatedly. "I would like to know in what area I have been incompetent," Dr Toben says.

After being told that the Education Department was primarily interested in the "welfare of students", Dr Toben asked parents of those he'd taught for their opinions. Of the 40 parents of students he'd taught, 30 signed letters of support. A spokesman for the Education Department refused to discuss details of the case other than to say that as the "correct procedures" had been followed, Dr Toben had no further right of appeal.

Dr Toben's wife, Georgina, took up a full time nursing job to support the family and Dr Toben took the only job he could find - driving the school bus from Goroke to Edenhope. "It's killed something within me," he says. "My livelihood has been taken away. The whole affair has been terribly painful and humiliating. The injustice of the whole affair lies in the fact that my 17-year teaching career was ended in such shabby circumstance."

But even though Dr Toben's teaching career has been cut short, his problems haven't. Graffiti attacking Dr Toben has appeared and he says his young son is still continually teased and taunted at school.

A year later, in the first week of May 1987, *The Sun* sent out its reporter David Henry. A few days later Mr Henry sent me a copy of his article with the remark that his editor had not selected it for publication on the cut-off day, Monday 11 May.

I was naturally disappointed, and on the following day I rang Radio 3AW's Deryn Hinch in Melbourne.

Surprisingly I got through to his talk-back line and while on hold could hear a listener angrily talking about *The Sun's* policy of using unsigned letters in its 50-50 column. The listener claimed that someone had written in about a matter concerning dogs, and that his name had been used. This had resulted in a number of cars driving past his house and stones had been thrown on to the roof. Hinch waxed long and hard against *The Sun's* letter's policy.
Then I was on-air.

Hinch: So you've been sacked from the Education Department?

Toben: Yes, and I can prove that I was framed.

Hinch: You're making serious allegations here. Let me hand you back to my producer and you can give him more particulars.

I did just that but Hinch never followed up the story. Two days later, on 14 May 1987, The Sun ran David Henry's article.

From academic to school bus driver - Fired teacher carries on the fight
A teacher sacked by the Education Department two years ago is fighting a lone battle in a small country town to clear his name. Dr Fredrick Toben, 42, was dismissed as English teacher at the Goroke Consilidated School in December 1984 and has been driving the school bus ever since.
As the holder of a PhD in English literature and philosophy, he is probably one of Australia's most qualified bus drivers. The grounds for his dismissal were given as "misconduct and incompetence" - tags he and his family, wife Georgina and six-year-old son Karl, have carried since the dismissal.
Dr Toben denies the charges and is fighting to clear his name in the tiny western Wimmera township where locals still remember the sacking as an incident which "turned the town upside down for six months".
Dr Toben claims the dismissal has destroyed his 17-year reputation as a teacher. he refuses to leave the town and says he "can't forget". The charges levelled against him amounted to the adoption of a firm code of discipline and the introduction of a rigid literacy program. The aim of this was to produce students who could read and write.
Dr Toben admits the innovations put him in the firing line. "I didn't mind being out there but I just had too much flack from behind," he said. "It turned into a political thing and I became a scapegoat in a town of 500 people. There are no secrets in a town like this. People took note."
As the momentum of his dismissal mounted through late 1984, Dr Toben became the butt of school yard gossip and ridicule. At one point , a female student goaded him with cries of "Hitler" and "poof". In response, he asked if she would like it if he want around calling her a lesbian. The girl lodged a formal complaint that she had been called a lesbian. Dr Toben feels the move was a catalyst to the sacking.
"I believe the Victorian Government school system is developing policies which are philosophically well-intentioned but which have a negative practical effect," Dr Toben said. "It is unrealistic to let children determine their own learning pace. I thank the teachers who bothered to push me along."
A senior Education Department official declined to comment on Dr Toben's dismissal.

Hot on Henry's heels was *The Bulletin's* Tony Abbot who managed to convince his editor that "the media is his only court of appeal left - if the article still comes over strong, that's because I feel sorry for the poor bugger".
A little while earlier my solicitor, Steven Amendola, had advised me that a settlement may well be possible because, "my wife's girlfriend's best friend is the wife of Education Department's legal officer, George Drossinos". Now he had written a lengthy advice to Legal Aid's John Bennett wherein he stated that I had been given natural justice and that correct procedures had been followed. Bennett then contacted me personally and I was able to give him my version of events - always insisting that Dr Curry had not given me the opportunity to respond to the allegations during the formal hearing in his office.
Tony Abbott also latched on to these observations of mine and persuaded his editor to run the story. That this *Bulletin* article caused concern for education minister, Ian Cathie, has been mentioned elsewhere. Also, within my own family it caused embarrassment. My sister's friend had returned from

an overseas flight and had read the story while on the plane. How dare I, she said, go public with such a story of shame. Needless to say that my sister survived her career within the Victorian state education system, but she prostituted herself in the process - swimming along with the feminists and any of those many fashionable ideologies that floated about throughout the late 60s to early 90s. I recall how someone once said to me: the face you have at 20 is the one given to you by God. Your face at 40 is given to you by Life. Your face at 60 is the one you deserve. Whether this applies to my sister is not for me to decide.

Case of the teacher who wasn't kept in

Doctor Fredrick Toben has achieved what many thought impossible. He has been sacked for "incompetence" as a teacher in an Australian school.

Despite the quoted desire of NSW Education Minister Rod Cavalier to weed out "malingerers in the staffroom", dismissal is not a threat our teachers normally face. Educators contacted by *The Bulletin* said that any dismissal was rare and dismissal for alleged incompetence almost unknown. The picture which emerges is of teaching authorities who take a benign, almost parental view of their employees' failings.

Most teachers dismissals follow significant criminal convictions. Others occur only after the failure of an elaborate counselling process. In Australian schools, complaints against teachers are normally handled by principals. If not resolved, they are referred to the department of education.

The Victorian Ministry of Education, which employs 55,000 teachers, dismisses "three or four" for incompetence each year - usually when "an element of senility" is involved. An official of a Catholic education office in Victoria, employing about 1000 teachers, said that he had "never written a letter of dismissal".

As a spokesman for the NSW Education Department - which employs nearly 48,000 teachers and has dismissed "a very few" - put it: "If someone has successfully passed teachers college, there are usually personal reasons for sub-standard performance…Quite often, with a particular group, a person may not feel comfortable…We would usually transfer such a person to another school where there was more motivation and security…"

Only when subsequent inspection shows no improvement and when a teacher declines to resign, may formal disciplinary proceedings be instituted - possibly leading to dismissal. Most teachers resign at this point. Fredrick Toben stubbornly refused because he had done nothing wrong.

Toben's troubles began in 1983 when the Goroke Consolidated School principal, Ray McCraw, withdrew approval for his permanency application. McCraw said that Toben's classes had deteriorated.

Toben said that McCraw felt threatened by his qualifications - Arts degrees from Melbourne and Wellington universities, a doctorate from Stuttgart University and 17 tyears' teaching experience in Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Nigeria and Zimbabwe.

Goroke is in far western Victoria. In a small town, small school atmosphere, rumors spread that McCraw was unhappy with Toben. He became something of an outcast in the staffroom. Some pupils began to disrupt his classes. Victoria - unlike other states - has no provision for formal inspection of teachers thought to be unsatisfactory. Toben asked several times for inspection. Instead, in mid-1984, a "support group" was set up. It comprised McCraw and three other teachers as well as Toben's nominee, fellow teacher Glenn Duncan. After four weeks' observation the group agreed that Toben's classes were unruly and that his teaching methods were inappropriate.

Duncan - who signed the group's report with some reservations - recently told The Bulletin that Toben "didn't really get a fair go" and that his problems were the result of a "personality clash" with McCraw, compounded by philosophical differences, which had gradually infected the whole school.

Next, a formal inquiry was held in October 1984. It was conducted jointly by a union official and a senior officer of the Victorian Ministry of Education who wrote to Toben beforehand saying that the inquiry was "'"act-finding, rather than judgmental". Despite this, the inquiry endorsed the support group's assessment and expressed a "strong preference" that Toben be "dismissed from the teaching service".

Toben's case was finally heard by the then Director-General of Victorian Education, Dr Norman Curry. According to Toben - and this has not been denied by the ministry - Curry said: "Give me a good reason why I should not act on the inquiry's recommendation that you be dismissed."

Normally , these hearings are quasi-judicial - both sides call and question witnesses. In his case, Curry questioned Toben and four of his supporters but Toben did not have a chance to question McCraw. Toben was not represented. On February 4, 1985, Curry informed Toben that he had been dismissed for "incompetence".

Since then, Toben - who now drives a school bus - has been trying to re-enter the teaching profession. The ministry has said that it will re-employ him after "evidence of successful teaching". But no school, so far, has been prepared tot ake him on. The Ombudsman has refused to investigate without evidence of "clear injustice". That, however, is precisely what Toben hoped an investigation would determine.

Toben's former union, the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association, told The Bulletin that correct procedures had been observed in his case as far as it was concerned.

A senior state educator, who requested anonymity[Steven Macphersons], admitted that "…it's not a fair world…Toben was not the worst teacher in the system and there are hundreds who are the same…Toben may have been unlucky…".
Bad luck or injustice? Professor Lauchlan Chipman, of Wollongong University, said that "even awkward and unpopular people have rights". He said Toben's case "typified the fate of the one-off model in Australia.
While school authorities are making determined efforts to lift teaching performance and elaborate procedures are in place to ensure that this does not occur at the expense of teachers' rights, it would be ironic if one of the few sacked for incompetence turned out not to have deserved it.

On 26 July 1987, Ross Brundrett's article appeared in the *Sunday Press*, which was an up-date of Jane Symons'13 April 1986 story.

Classy driver on road to nowhere
Australia's most over-qualified bus driver is still travelling the road to nowhere. Dr Fredrick Toben, who holds two arts degrees and a doctorate in English literature and philosophy, is still going broke in Goroke.
It's 2½ years since he was dismissed from his $27,000-a-year job as English teacher at the Goroke Consolidated School and took up driving the school bus for just $10,000 a year. His wife Georgina has been forced to return to full-time nursing to support her husband and six-year-old son Karl. Despite the hardships, the frustrations and the soul-shattering rejections, Dr Toben, 43, is determined to stick it out in the small Wimmera township of Goroke. He says he is fighting for personal pride …for justice.
"Nothing has changed really. They still won't let me teach and I still won't give up," he said. "I still believe I will triumph in the end…that our society will rise above the pettiness and prejudices and I will be reinstated.
If nothing else, the persistence of the man is to be admired. Dr Toben admits to having applied for teaching jobs all over Australia ("Queensland, NSW, everywhere…") and has been knocked back for every single one of them. His credentials are impressive. Arts degrees from Melbourne and Wellington universities, a PhD from Stuttgart University, and 17 years' teaching all over the world.
Dismissed
But whenever he applies for a teaching job, the question arises: Why did he leave his last job?
"I have to tell them I was dismissed, for incompetence…that's always the end of the interview," he said.
He would like to tell them that his dismissal was more a case of a personality clash with a school principal, and a concerted "slur" campaign by a select few students who set out to upset his classes and ruin his credibility. He would like to, but no-one wants to listen. Not after they hear the word "incompetent".
And that's what drives him on, the fight to clear his name in the face of overwhelming indifference. It's what makes him and his family struggle through, living just a kilometre away from the school which caused all the heartache.
It's quite ironic that the dozen teachers who taught the 50 secondary students at the school (there are also 100 primary students) when Dr Toben was dismissed in February, 1985, have all since left. Only Dr Toben remains. The one teacher, it seems who actually wants to teach at Goroke. The one teacher who can't.
For his wife, Georgina, the situation has become so desperate that she has broken her silence with an open letter to Education Ministry official Dr Ken Boston. She talks about her husband's "unjust dismissal" and how she had become the main breadwinner 'while watching my husband and son suffer so. I have remained silent till now because it is painful for me to think about what my life should have been like and so I try to shut it out of my mind…I don't think we deserve the hell on earth we have lived in for the last four years. is there no compassion in your heart?"
Both Mrs Toben and her husband pay tribute to the "sympathetic" people of Goroke. Dr Toben says it was a minority who caused problems at the school. "There were three families who made the trouble."
Strict
And children who mocked Dr Toben's German background and strict discipline by calling him "Hitler".
Dr Toben admitted to demanding discipline in the classroom, but her never raised a cane to a students: "There was no suggestion of that."
Recently, fellow teachers Glenn Duncan and Geoff French have come out in support of Dr Toben. Mr Duncan was a member of the inquiry panel which agreed that Dr Toben's teaching methods were inappropriate and his classes unruly. But he says that he never considered Dr Toben incompetent.
In a letter to the Wimmera Mail-Times he said there were "many pieces of unpleasant yet interesting evidence strangely ignored by the Education Ministry's official inquiry". He confirmed Dr Toben's claim that there was a "conspiracy" against him, saying one parent even boasted, long before the inquiry, that he was "getting rid of Toben".
But despite the support, Dr Toben admits he is no closer to getting back to teaching. He has contacted the State ombudsman, he has obtained legal advice, but there was no good news there.
"But I have been told by one Education Ministry official that if I manage three months of successful teaching somewhere, then I may be reinstated," he said.
But that's Catch-22 material. They'll let him teach again only if he can prove himself as a teacher, but they won't give him the chance.

The Victorian Secondary Teachers Association, the Victorian High Schools' Principals Association sa that Dr Toben's dismissal was within the rules, end of story. "They've closed ranks," said Dr Toben.
There are times, while he drives the school bus the 30 km from Goroke to Edenhope when things "churn up inside". You begin to doubt yourself. You wonder whether all those years of training were worth it, whether anything was worth what we have gone through," he said. "You get plenty of time to think when you drive a bus."
Whether that's a good or bad thing, he wasn't so sure.

On 15 December, 1987, **The Age** columnist, Michael Barnard, gave my story his full treatment. This, for a number of teachers, et al, put me squarely in the so-called right-wing camp.

One man's fight to clear his name
If I had to nominate a Victorian Battler of the Year - perhaps "fighter" is more appropriate here - an eminent candidate would be Dr Fredrick Toben, the Goroke school teacher dismissed by the education department amid a swirl of local controversy three years ago.
Dr Toben, it was alleged, was incompetent. Since then he has been fighting doggedly to clear his name, mostly at great financial and emotional cost, He weathered the humbling and frustrating transformation from his chosen calling as a highly qualified English and philosophy teacher - arts degrees from Melbourne and Wellington universities and a PhD from Stuttgart - to the only alternative local job then available, that of school bus driver at less than half the salary, and has faced many other challenges besides.
The Toben case has been aired sporadically by newspapers and television, and taken up by MPs. But every time it surfaces the department and ministry remain adamant: all the correct procedures (such as appointment of a teacher "support" group and a panel of inquiry were followed in assessing Dr Toben, they say, and the case cannot be reopened.
The 43-year-old former teacher, however, with 17 years classroom and tutorial experience behind him in Australia, NZ, West Germany, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, simply will not let the matter rest.
He was, he says, manipulated out of his Goroke post, teaching English, because of his firm attitude to discipline and insistence on a rigid literacy program.
Newspaper columnists are bombarded with special pleading and cases of alleged injustice and soon learn the wisdom of not jumping to conclusions. I first became intimately acquainted with Dr Toben's fight the best part of two years ago and still do not claim to be able to arrive at informed conclusions on all the rights and wrongs in the tangled differences between Dr Toben and the then principal (a much lesser academically qualified man) and various fellow teachers.
But there are disturbing features about the case, sufficient to make one ponder the fickleness of the machinery by which a skilled man's career in education can effectively be killed stone dead, without any subsequent avenue of appeal or wider inquiry.
What is reasonably clear is that personal antagonism played a significant part in the events leading to Dr Toben's demise, not only within Goroke Consolidated School in 1984 but, once the gossip started, in the wider community as well. Even a full year after the dismissal, swastikas and abusive slogans attacking Dr Toben and Mr Edwin Mitchell, a former Goroke school council president hounded from his council post because of alleged bias towards Dr Toben, were daubed over Mr Mitchell's newsagency (*Wimmera Mail-Times* 3 January 1986).
The swastikas are revealing. Dr Toben was born in Germany in 1944 but he left before he was a year old.
The really disturbing features, however, lie in other areas, notably the strong defence Dr Toben has received from some fellow teachers of the day and other key players. In a detailed letter to the Mail-Times of 5 August 1987 - some three years after the main event - farmer Brian Mann, a school council member during the crucial period, posed a series of questions, culminating bluntly with: "Can a teacher faced with a personality clash have no right of appeal against trumped-up charges?"
Dr Toben , he said had been "well-spoken, well-dressed, clean-cut, a non-smoker and of sober habits…and an example others might have followed."
Glen Duncan, now an art teacher at Ringwood Tech., has been even more forthright, saying that Dr Toben was a "marked man" months before the inquiry that resulted in his dismissal. "There were many pieces of unpleasant yet interesting evidence strangely ignored by the Education Ministry's official inquiry…I even found out much later through Toben's Freedom of Information documents that lies were told about me. Why?"
"Isn't it interesting', Mr Duncan asks, "that of the 40 parents whose children were taught by Toben, 30 signed his petition saying they were pleased with his teaching?" (Of the other 10, Dr Toben tells me, three were hostile and seven just did not want to be involved.)
Another teacher, Geoffrey French, now at Ballarat High, wrote to the Mail-Times (24 July 1987) suggesting that Dr Toben had, in part, been made a scapegoat for poor discipline.
"it was obvious to me that Dr Toben's lessons were innovative and thoroughly planned. I could only assume thse people were deliberately attempting to get rid of him for some particular personal reasons, as I could see the time and work he put not only into his teaching but also the school radio station, which he set up with the students."
One could go on. For instance, testimonial to Dr Toben over the name of Professor S. D. Atkinson of the department of educational foundations, University of Zimbabwe: "His performance in the classroom was very impressive…I believe Dr Toben to be a man of high principles and exemplary character."

(Perhaps I should emphasise at this point that none of the criticisms cited above are meant to reflect on the present state of Goroke Consolidated, or its present administration.)
Possibly there are criticisms of Dr Toben that may be sustained. By the same token, the defence quoted here does little more than scratch the surface of what may be found in his favour.
At issue is a man's career. Dr Toben has travelled thousands of kilometres seeking teaching posts in Victoria and interstate, but always his "record" becomes a stumbling block. The catch-22 is that the department says it will reconsider his position if he can demonstrate a satisfactory spell of teaching, but he cannot get the chance because he has been labelled incompetent.
Late this year he did, for two days a week, gain a job tutoring nurses in sociology at Warrnambool Institute of Advanced Education, making round trips of 500 kilometres in and among his school bus driving between Goroke and Edenhope.
But Dr Toben wants more. Specifically, he seeks exoneration and reinstatement at Goroke, where his family lives. Bureaucracies, however, are always loath to admit that they might have been even a little bit wrong.
A nagging thought is that had Dr Toben been a homosexual, female or black, a vociferous lobby group might well have already precipitated a review. Perhaps incompetence of sorts does feature in his sad story. The question is, whose? And how does a person caught up in a system like this ever clear his name, once given that it deserves to be cleared?

After my appearance in the County Court, and its judgements of 27 January and 10 February 1989 - and the 20 March 1990 Full Supreme Court Appeal - there was a media lull. My case was then aired again nationally when Frank Devine's column appeared in *The Australian* on 18 April 1991.

An education experience of the worst kind
...You take my life
When you take the means
whereby I live.
That is from *The Merchant of Venice*. The lines - and, in fact, the entire play - have painful relevance for Fredrick Toben, unemployed school teacher of Goroke, Victoria.
Toben is not, unfortunately, the only 47-year-old person now out of work, in debt and hovering on the edge of despair. But he is probably the only one able to put part of the blame on Shakespeare.
In 1983, as a newly hired "temporary", Toben set his Year 10 English class at Goroke Consolidated School, located in sheep country in north-west Victoria, to studying The *Merchant of Venice*.
The principal challenged Toben to tell him what use Shakespeare was to kids whose lives would be spent scrabbling for a living on remote farms. Not having thought much about utilitarian measurement of Shakespeare, Toben gave a vague response.
"They don't need it," the principal declared flatly.
Toben none the less persisted with classroom study of The Merchant of Venice. Before long, however, he became aware that his Shakespeare "obsession" was being derided by other teachers at the school, notably the principal, with the result that the incipient interest of his students gradually changed to sulky resistance.
Toben's relationship with the Goroke principal deteriorated. Toben was castigated for correcting spelling and grammar in creative writing exercises, for speaking "sarcastically" to unruly students and sending them out of classes. Other teachers recall a bitter personality clash between Toben and the principal.
Indeed, Toben seems to have been an odd-man-out from the start at this bush school - highly educated and cultivated, widely travelled, meticulously dressed (usually in dark blazer, striped tie and grey slacks), speaking in the precise, accentless tones for whom, like German-born Toben, English is a mastered but not native language. Even the new car Toben had traded up to -a white Volvo - got backs up.
In 1985 Toben was dismissed from the employ of the Victorian Education Department, an event of the utmost rarity even for a temporary teacher. the grounds given were that he was incompetent and disobedient. Ever since, Toben has campaigned for reinstatement, claiming to have been done down by lies and deception and to have been victimised because he opposed the "equal outcomes" philosophy of Victoria's public education system.
In 1989, a Melbourne County Court ruled Toben's dismissal "void and invalid" and awarded him back pay. Toben immediately resigned from a job as a school bus driver in anticipation of returning to teaching.
But the Education Department refused - and still refuses - to give him a job, asserting that the County Court invalidated his dismissal because correct procedures had not been followed in charging Toben with disobedience. But the judge had found no procedural shortcomings in respect of the incompetence charges.
Ergo, departmental procedures having been applied correctly, Toben remained an incompetent, unworthy of employment as a teacher in Victorian public schools.
As often happens when individuals get entangled with a Kafkaesque bureaucracy, Toben has become obsessed. Trying to force the Victorian Education Department to take him back consumes his life.
His marriage has broken up and he is on the dole. He applies constantly for private school teaching jobs, but a 47-year-old who has been dismissed for incompetence is not a prime contender for employment in these hard times.
Toben spends most of his days enjoying intermittent custody of his 10-year-old son and preparing to represent himself in three pending defamation actions against Victorian Education officials.

He and I have been penfriends, fax friends for several months. If the Toben document archive grows much larger, I will have to move house. I have avoided people like him for many years on several continents.
But no Ancient Mariner has ever talked as sensibly to me, and practically nothing smells right about the Toben case.
It doesn't smell right when I call a senior officer of the Victorian Education Department, whom I know to have been centrally involved in the matter for several years, and still to be, only to be told, at first, that the officer recalls little of the past and knows nothing of the present state of affairs - and subsequently that, on legal advice, neither the officer nor the department will comment.
A strong aroma arises when one considers Toben's background in the context of his alleged incompetence. He has a BA degree from Melbourne University and a PhD (in philosophy) from Stuttgart. He has 17 years of teaching experience - mainly in New Zealand, Germany and Zimbabwe.
Perhaps the most crucially, Toben grew up in north-west Victoria and attended a small country school like Goroke Consolidated. His father, an immigrant from Germany, farmed nearby for 30 -odd years. His twin brother still farms in the district. When he started teaching at Goroke, Toben was offended by the principal's contemptuous remarks about the town and the district's farm families.
Having set off with his brother for a European adventure when they were in their mid-20s, Toben stayed abroad longer than he had intended. In Zimbabwe, observing British expatriates, he realised to his horror that he was, in his mid-30s, at risk of becoming like them - a man without a home. He married the girl he had been going out with in Zimbabwe, and jumped at the chance of a teaching job in Goroke, determined to establish himself in a part of the world where he felt he belonged.
The Toben affair smells when one learns that 30 out of the 40 Goroke parents whose children Toben had taught signed a petition praising his work with them.
It smells when one considers how markedly different Toben's teaching philosophy is from the one that has prevailed in Victoria.
There is a stink around when a teacher union official publicly declares: "I don't think Mr Toben will be employed again by the Education Department. He has criticised the department. He has even criticised the union."
Once at a social gathering Toben managed to seize the ear of the then education minister, Joan Kirner, and plead for her intervention.
She said: You'd be surprised how little influence a minister has in such matters."
Surprised? If that is true, I am terrified.

My case had now finally become an open political matter. The Liberal forces used it to push against the Victorian Labor government. Piers Akermann, editor of Melbourne's *Herald-Sun*, sent reporter Simon Plant and photographer George Salpigtidis to Goroke during the 1991 April-May school holidays. I was fortunate enough to have my son, Karl, for those holidays, and when the article appeared in the features page of the Herald-Sun on 15 May, his classmates found out a little more of what his father had been up to in the bush.

Bad Lesson - They sacked Fredrick Toben after he insisted on teaching Shakespeare, Simon Plant reports.
From his study in the tiny Wimmera town of Goroke, Dr Fredrick Toben is preparing to wage war.
The study looks like any other, but this book-cluttered nook, deep in the heart of Victoria's sheep country, is where the 47-year-old teacher is plotting the next phase of his seven-year battle against Victoria's Education Department.
Dr Toben was sacked from Goroke Consolidated School in 1985 on the grounds of alleged incompetence and has been fighting to clear his name ever since.
The fight, waged in the County and Supreme Courts, has taken a heavy toll on Dr Toben's family life (he separated from his wife, Georgina, in 1987) and his finances (he is $40,000 in debt and surviving on dole cheques).
But like a battle-hardened warrior, the German-born educator refuses to admit defeat.
Dr Toben issued five defamation writs last year against Education Department chiefs and former teaching colleagues at Goroke Consolidated, and anticipates they will be heard in court before the end of the year.
"They (the Education Department) know I can't last much longer," he says. "But I've drawn the line and I'm saying, 'No further'. I'm not giving up or running away because I know I' not incompetent."
The long-running Toben affair is a critical test of Education Department policy, but as it has unfolded in the papers and the courts, the case has also come to symbolise a wider battle raging in Australia's public education system.
It mirrors a tug of war between the forces of tradition, who want a return to exams, discipline and the three Rs, and the forces of change who believe these trends are out of step with egalitarian education initiatives in the 1990s.
"Dr Toben is the very embodiment of a basic philosophical clash," Professor Lauchlan Chipman, of Woolongong University, says. "Here is a dedicated teacher in the Mr Chips mould who believes in the old ideal of developing students' full potential, and an education system which regards intellectual excellence as some thing to be traded away if the case warrants it." Dr Toben, who holds arts degrees from Melbourne and Wellington Universities and a PhD from Stuttgart, is a self-confessed conservative. Dressed for this interview in buttoned blue blazer and tie, he readily declares his support for no-nonsense teaching.

"I'm not afraid of students," he says. "Far from it. Put me in one of the rougher schools in Melbourne's western suburbs and I'd soon fix them up." But in his travels over 17 years as a teacher in Australia, West Germany, New Zealand, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, Dr Toben has championed one issue above all others: literacy.

At Goroke Consolidated, which he joined in 1983, he carried on the crusade by teaching Shakespeare to year-nine students, organising spelling bees and enforcing a rigid literacy program. The school principal apparently expressed reservations, and some of Dr Toben's colleagues, who allegedly treated him as something of an outcast in the staff room, suggested he abandon Shakespeare. "The attitude was, don't rock the boat, don't stress the students," Dr Toben recalls. "They must fit in, even if they can't read or write. Well, I'm sorry, I couldn't accept that."

Dr Toben's stand prompted the school to appoint a "support group" to observe his teaching methods over four weeks in July 1984. Later in the year, another panel comprising teacher unions and Education Department representatives conducted an informal inquiry. The Director-General of Education, Dr Norman Curry, finally dismissed Dr Toben in February 1985 for "incompetence" but six years on, the victim is convinced he was singled out for political reasons. "If you don't tie the line, you're out. I'm frightened there are a lot of dedicated teachers who are being sidelined because they are prepared to worry about education."

Professor Chipman, former president of the Australian Council for Educational Standards, says there is also a growing rift between teachers of the "Old Left" who have traditionally championed excellence as a passport to self-improvement and those of the "New Left who believe education should reflect what the mass of people are likely to reasonably achieve. The result of this clash is inevitably an averaging down of standards."

The Institute of Education Administration disagrees and insists that the VCE and other initiatives are encouraging personal excellence by combining different testing procedures.

"All the available evidence , on balance, suggests that in the basic areas of achievement, we have been improving slightly," Institute director Gerry Tickel says. The Liberal-National Opposition has promised to reassess the VCE and school standards generally if it wins the next state election but there is no guarantee that a change of government in Victoria will benefit Dr Toben. On paper, he is still an "incompetent" teacher.

When the County Court overturned Dr Toben's dismissal and awarded him $16,000 in lost wages in January, 1989, it made no finding on his competence. Nor did it order the Ministry of Education to re-employ him. The Ministry declined to comment, but according to Dr Toben, it is prepared to consider his re-employment if he can provide "evidence of Successful teaching".

While he is labelled "incompetent", though, there is no way any school (public or private) will take him on.

"This is like the Dreyfus case," Dr Toben says. "I've been banished to Devil's Island and I've got to return and clear my name. I want to go back to teach. It's my aim to work for another 20 years." Friends in Goroke have suggested he pack it in, change his name and seek employment interstate. But Dr Toben, raised in nearby Edenhope, refuses to leave the remote Wimmera town. "Why should I?" he says. "This is my home."

The next day the *Herald-Sun* ran this editorial comment:

Not too clever

The quality of mercy is decidedly strained in the case of Dr Fredrick Toben reported in this newspaper yesterday. The highly qualified teacher's problem began in the early 1980s at Goroke Consolidated School. in pursuit of his continuing crusade to instil literacy, he taught Shakespeare to year-nine students, organised spelling bees and enforced a rigid literacy program.

This rash presumption led to a head-on philosophical clash with his peers, leading into a series of inquiries into his teaching methods and finally to his dismissal in February, 1985, for "incompetence". In 1989 the County Court overturned the dismissal, awarded him lost wages, but did not find on his competence.

At the heart of the Toben affair is the wider debate between traditionalists, who believe in developing a student's full potential, and the ideologues who seek to impose a grey sameness as a tactic in the class war. As a former president of the Australian Council for Education Standards, Professor Lauchlan Chipman, remarked: "The result of this clash is inevitably an averaging down of the standards."

But while the debate continues on whether education should exploit each student's full potential, or whether it should be the great leveller, Dr Toben remains in limbo, still labelled "incompetent" and unable to get a teaching job.

On the evidence, it seems unjust he should continue to suffer; the standards he values might just be what we need to make this the clever country.

It was gratifying to have strangers respond to these articles. One lady from Noosa, Queensland, offered me her home for a well-deserved holiday. Others told me their own personal problems with education bureaucrats, something that contextualised my battle. Still others send me stamps so that I could continue to write to the newspapers and plague them with my concerns about the direction Australian education is taking.

One of my last long letters to the *Mail-Times* was published on 25 September 1992. Sometimes I wondered whether the editor was short of copy whenever he gave me so much space!

School Discipline

Sir, - School discipline, the final word on this timeless problem. Concerned, *Mail-Times*, August 26, and Valerie Webb, September 2, highlight a problem which has, and always will be, with us - undisciplined children.

What is new is the degree of violence we now see in our schools. In recent years some Australian schools have seen a whole range of violence, from student-student and student-teacher bashing to outright murder in the classroom.

Society at large also reflects this rise in violence. That's why it's heartening to see Victorian Secondary Teachers Association assistant secretary, Mary Bluett publicly admit that our schools have a disciplinary problem. I believe this is the first time the VSTA has admitted this.

But I find it disturbing that she blames the attack on the Northcote High School deputy principal on economic hardship and frustrations caused by the recession. Nothing excuses such uncivil behaviour and our society must not tolerate it.

In any case, teachers at private schools must have laughed when they read Mary Bluett's explanation.

Twaddle

A review of aspects of the school discipline debate over the past decade highlights interesting facts.

Since 1983, when Labor and the teachers' unions took over the Department of Education. Fashionable twaddle surrounded the Glasser discipline model. The time-out room was supposed to free teachers from inevitable student-teacher confrontation.

A number of schools adopted this consensus discipline model, without much success.

In September, 1983, the last director-general of education Dr Norman Curry expressed the department's new discipline policy, two years before Minister for Education, Ian Cathie, removed him from office: "The main thrust of this new approach is to encourage each school to develop its own policy on student discipline within the guidelines provided and thus to involve parents, teachers and students in a co-operative endeavour which reflects the views of the school and will thus be more accepted by all. The present procedures relating to student discipline were recommended to the minister by a group which consisted of parents, teachers, principals and specialist departmental staff. In no way are they anti-teacher in tone or in practice. They recognise that through co-operation between schools and parents more will be achieved for all students."

Demoted

A year later, when he disciplined a teacher who had been convicted on a drug charge, Dr Curry made a remarkably disturbing decision. He merely 'slapped the teacher's wrist and admonished him for being 'a naughty boy'. The VSTA can confirm this incident.

In contrast, a teacher who 'thumped' a class-room thug was demoted and transferred to the correspondence school.

VSTA-protected teachers in trouble would invariably swell the 6000-odd pool of teachers out on stress-leave.

In 1988 a remarkable thing happened when then editor of *Education Age* Geoff Maslen ran a critical series on classroom discipline. A respondent, Frank Dando, principal of Ashwood Boys School, summed up the problem thus:

"…I have this year been teaching without a break for 40 years and I have a master's degree in remedial education so I have some practical and theoretical understanding of the teacher's job in the classroom and considerable sympathy for my colleagues in the state system. It is not possible to do any meaningful work in the classroom unless you are in control; whether you are apparently in control is irrelevant - I am quite capable of convincing my class that I am - running a democracy!

To control a classroom you need as a last resort to produce a short, sharp and non-negotiable punishment otherwise the class gets out of control and you go out on stress. I am quite ready to be told that there is no place for punishment in an ideal classroom but I would prefer to be told by a practising teacher. Could this be pondered by someone high up in the state system, preferably someone who had been teaching lately."

Unendurable

Two years later, the general discipline situation in our state schools had not improved. It also became more difficult to blame individual teachers for not coping with unruly students. Teachers with an unblemished record began to speak out.

Chris Curtis, Victoria's youngest senior teacher lamented bitterly: "My 15 years of experience in subject co-ordination, curriculum development, the day-to-day running of a school, not to mention classroom teaching itself, including a 92 percent pass rate, are lost to the system

Why? Because the headaches, shortness of breath, sleeplessness and chest pains caused by the modern classroom jungle became unendurable. A highly recommended assessment for promotion has not protected me. Excellent references from past principals, colleagues and students have not protected me. Ministry reorganisation, curriculum reform, school amalgamation and career-four restructure mean nothing.

When a teacher walks into a classroom today, he is on his own. I have a thick folder of incidents from the past 15 months of my career which support my views of other teachers and education experts who say we have a discipline problem. Those who belong to the other camp, who believe the problem does not exist or is under control, simply do not know what it is like out there in the real world that actual teachers face every day."

Curtis got his senior teacher grading from now assistant general manager of the Department of School Education, Jim Betson.

Chaos

Since then, more teachers and parents have cried out against the chaos in the classroom. But our education bureaucracy, supported by teachers' unions, continues to follow the absurd ideology of indulgence which merely encourages students to become hedonists.

Students are encouraged to follow their feelings without being urged to think about any consequences, to please themselves and do what makes them feel good. Unfortunately, life outside the classroom isn't like that.

Also, the ideology of choice, of diversity, has been pushed to its limits. When a 40-odd subject choice is offered to Victorian Certificate of Education students, one may well wonder how students will ever achieve unity of mind. If thinking is to become purposeful, if students are to rise above the immediate pleasurable moment, then surely we ought to focus their minds upon essentials.

Further, the Department of School Education has as yet not dared to draw up a code of ethics for its employees, as has the Police Department. Such a moral framework also would literally help students to find a home within themselves, rather than have them vent their frustrations on individuals and social institutions.

Tribunals
Finally, discrimination, the essence of developed, sophisticated taste, is presented to students as unreasonable behaviour, to be pursued by anti-discrimination tribunals. It amazes me that basics, such as the fact that learning cannot take place if environment and students remain undisciplined, have been ignored for so long.
However, it will serve no-one's interests to have the force of law brought into our schools, except perhaps in the form of the friendly police officer who may occasionally have to remind students of their civic rights and duties.
Our current disciplinary problems appear to have reached a point where individual schools have no alternative but to tighten up and discard the nonsense disciplinary ideologies of the past 20 years. It is a facts that the 1950s and '60s did not throw up too many serious discipline problems, but then these decades were not afflicted by drug problems either. Nor was there the pernicious sexual harassment ideology to tear apart male-female relationships. Any primary teacher knows how to deal with rude behaviour without recourse to sexual harassment thinking; unfortunately teachers cannot follow Frank Dando's advice for fear of having a writ slapped on them by some aggrieved parents.
And there we are, at the crucial point, the family unit. Is school discipline merely reflecting what is happening in our families? How many students are left to their own devices while father and mother work to keep the family home intact?
Or, is this question another form of scapegoating, of teachers relinquishing their professional responsibility by not ensuring that schools have a disciplined learning environment?
Fredrick Toben
Church Street
Goroke 3412

Griping, scape-goating individuals

I continued my personal campaign to keep my case before the public's eye and it was good to have the *Mail-Times'* editor not once rejecting any of my letters to his paper. This one appeared in the *Mail-Times* on 12 February 1992:

Education
Sir, - Over the years I have been rather critical of what our education bureaucracy has been doing to our state school system. Now I must balance the equation by praising where praise is due.
I would like to congratulate Murtoa Secondary College principal Laurie Bester for having had the courage to speak out against aspects of the government's school restructuring policy, *Mail-Times*, January 29.
I would also like to augment what I wrote in my January 15 letter. I stated that senior educationists 'watched in silence as our once great state education system began to crumble'.
It was the Federation of Victorian School Administrators which, on March 23, 1990, placed an advertisement in a daily newspaper wherein it stated: "Principals have lost confidence in the Minister for Education", then Mrs Kirner.
There was also the Institute of Senior Officers of the Victorian Education Service which, in a letter to the *Mail-Times*, February 8, 1991, expressed its serious concerns about the direction in which our central education bureaucracy was heading.
Also around this time last year principal and chairman of VCAB Howard Kelley informed me that such sentiments were shared by him.
He advised me to concentrate on positive aspects of our education system because the present illness had reached terminal stage. Everyone could see that the Kirner Government was a dead horse.
Laurie Bester might be the public servant who will succeed in swaying his colleagues to make similar public statements.
This would greatly boost morale within our embattled schools where many hardworking teachers are close to despair.
Early retirement, unfortunately, is a mere running away from the important battle just looming on the horizon. So, good teachers, hang in there!
VCAB's announcement that this year's VCE English will not include a comic strip is to be welcomed.
Let me end by quoting University of Melbourne's Professor Brian Start:
"The incoming non-socialist government…will have an Augean stable - full of decades of bulldust - to resolve…the stable must be cleansed and great wariness exercised about persons who display great changes of heart, seeing of the light or resurrection as ''born again'' educators...sleepers are lethal, unless identified".
My hope is that this year's incoming students will be taught the basics of educated English so that they do not shame themselves when they communicate with one another.
Fredrick Toben
Goroke 3412

A number of individuals offered me financial assistance which enabled me to continue my legal pursuit of those who had destroyed my livelihood. I had also begun to write my own newsletter. The final one, dated 25 February 1992, focused on Bruce Wilson, the principal of my old school, Edenhope Secondary College.

Dear…
I thank you again for responding to my 4 February 1992 letter. Your financial contribution is also much appreciated and I am now able to list my five defamation actions in court - this despite the steep rise in listing fees which rose in November 1991 to $225. Per action.

For the record I would now like to state that your response to my cries for help - which in its present form began on 31 July 1990 - has enabled me to continue my seven year battle against various Ministry of Education personnel.
Interestingly enough the Ombudsman, who has been involved in my case since 1985, has again taken a closer look at it. In a letter too The Age an aggrieved person claimed that investigation authorities need different eyes because they keep looking in the wrong place.
It bothers me that I have now heard from a number of people who have made similar claims about the Ombudsman's effectiveness.
To claim that money and resources are in limited supply is an excuse aimed at hiding the breakdown of moral and intellectual courage. (See my letter celebrating Sir Douglas Wright's virtues.)
As this present material is my final submission to you, I would like to highlight another factor in my story by focusing upon the Edenhope Secondary College principal, Mr Bruce Wilson.
Thirty years ago I matriculated with honours from then Edenhope High School. On 11 June 1980 I spent one emergency teaching day at my former school. I was not impressed by the slack atmosphere and the generally scruffy nature of a number of teachers I saw. I briefly mentioned this to Bruce Wilson, stating that under the stewardship of urbane John Collins, the school had a polished atmosphere. His response seemed so sympathetic at the time.
During my 1984 troubles at the Goroke school I became aware of a rumour which stated that I had had troubles at Edenhope High School. In 1985, when I became the Goroke-Edenhope school bus driver, I confronted Bruce Wilson on this matter. He flatly denied ever having made any negative comment about my person to anyone.
Further I when in 1986 two former Goroke students began their HSC studies at Edenhope - thereby having to travel on my bus - I had to contend with nonsense from these former Goroke Consolidated School troublemakers and ringleaders.
At Goroke some teachers had pampered them to such an extent that they found Edenhope too demanding. Both left the school within a matter of two weeks; the girl joined the army and the boy became a sales person. (See my letter 'Courageous stand against disruptive students'.)
In December 1991 I discovered that Bruce Wilson had lied to me about the truth-content of that 1984 rumour. Staffing officer, Gene Haugh - the gentleman who wished me to lie down for him - had written a note about a conversation he had had with Wilson on 23 June 1982, copy enclosed.
I confronted Wilson about this revelation and he became defensive, requesting I put the matter in writing. I obliged and sent copies of my letter to various public persons including the Ombudsman.
I have called Bruce Wilson unprincipled and a liar.
A couple of examples will further illustrate Wilson's mental make-up.
On 19 April 1985 he wrote a letter to parents of all Year 8 and 9 students, copy enclosed. Therein he blames **a number of discipline problems and a general lack of enthusiasm for school among Year 8 and 0 students** on a staffing vacancy.
Only the year before I had been blamed for creating such problems at Goroke.
In 1980 Wilson, in his second year as principal of Edenhope High School, scape-goated. Five years later he blames central staffing. Such behaviour cannot create a sophisticated learning environment. Anyone afflicted with such an attitude is motivated by hatred and envy and not by any value system, by principles or ideals.
Interestingly, Wilson went on study leave last year. He is completing a PhD in VCE maths. One pearl of wisdom from his Melbourne University sojourn has been captured in the school's 1991 magazine: **"I am totally convinced that tertiary education is wasted on the young".**
So much for Bruce Wilson who credits me with the power of destroying his staff's morale…some power!

In conclusion, I have enclosed an extract about Sir Isaac Isaacs' problems as a teacher. He was lucky in that his superiors had a moral dimension, a sense of justice. I was lied to by Dr Norman Curry and done in by Legal Officer, George Drossinos. I am still awaiting an apology from those Ministry officials who destroyed my family and my professional livelihood.
I have asked for an apology from Dr Peter Hill who could do this on behalf of those public servants who have hurt me so.
I haven't given up hope yet in receiving such an apology.
In this sense I thank you for your unconditional support throughout these past years. I shall not let you down whe I expose the corrupt process which labelled me an incompetent and disobedient English teacher.
Most sincerely
Fredrick Toben

My letter to the University of Melbourne's *Alumni* magazine was well received by my benevolent critics:

Moral and intellectual courage

In 1961 Sir Douglas Wright wrote a Prologue to the disturbing W H C Eddy book *Orr*. This Prologue has provided many victims of conspiracies with much-needed moral support because it offers a succinct analysis of this subtle elimination process.
Sir Douglas identified its elements thus:
1. Defame the victim's professional competence, mental balance, truthfulness, etc.
2. Reward the collaborators from victim's group.
3. Weld together pack of prosecutors.
4. Proclaim authority of the corporation.
5. Spread defamation through victim's personal links and loyalties.
6. Isolate victim by giving him the silent treatment.
7. Usually this leads to the victim's resignation which is taken as proof of guilt. Dismissal occurs if the victim refuses to resign.
8. A strong victim highlights the moral standards of society.
9. People in authority perpetuate their own types because no one wishes to be shamed by his successor.
10. Employees are as courageous as their security of livelihood and reputation permits.
11. A governing body of an institution devoted to truth and justice is corrupt if it obstructs enquiry into its stewardship.

Sir Douglas concluded his analysis with a timeless warning: “Such state of affairs is the antithesis of democratic processes and places the society in imminent danger”.
It is in this sense that I personally ask: Where are our present-day Wrights?
Fredrick Toben, Goroke.

Not only Sir Douglas but also Sir James Darling comforted me with their analysis of my personal plight. The fact that they admitted to my having been shafted by corrupt individuals gave me the strength to pursue these corrupt persons. Sir James had some kind words for me which illuminated the difference between the “bungling British way” and the “efficient German way”. I reminded him that surely the mix of these two strands within the Australian context would have created a product worthy of praise. Sir James assured me that had I been on his staff when he was headmaster of Geelong Grammar School he would not have dismissed me. He mentioned the conflict he had had with a number of ideologically diverse teachers at that school, such a ‘Nugget’ Coombs. He welcomed such intellectual challenges, but then said that I could expect such mental capacity only in the rarest of principal within the state system - certainly not from a primary school principal like McCraw.

One of my letter in support of teachers who made the news was printed on 25 February 1987, in the *Central Western Daily*, Orange, New South Wales:

‘Courageous stand against disruptive students’
A few days ago I saw a news item on TV about a Mr Hallestrand, a teacher at Orange High School, having called a student a swine or words to that effect. Unfortunately news items do not give us an in-depth account of an incident’s history. Hence it is very difficult to make exacting comments about the issues raised by such reports.
It appears to me that Mr Hallestrand has taken a courageous stand against students who are more intent on disrupting the learning environment than actually getting down to solid, hard work.
Any teacher who has the courage to put his foot down and state quite clearly to disruptive students: this far and no further, is acting on principles.
Unfortunately in many of our government schools to act on principles often reaps ridicule from colleagues and students alike.
The trend today is to pander to unsophisticated peer groups which often dominate a whole whole environment.
Dedicated teachers exit from the government school system and attempt to find a more congenial atmosphere within the private system, where the learning environment is usually guaranteed by an effective discipline system.
All this is of course common knowledge among teachers, and those who cannot take the pressure any longer often opt out of the system altogether.
Those who cannot get out of the system attempt to survive somehow - even if it does mean to give the students entertainment rather than solid work.
In this way teachers become prisoners of their own system - and the concept of freedom becomes irrelevant.
And that is a tragedy for our society, for our nation.
I wish Mr Hellestand well and I hope he survives the push against him.
In conclusion I would like to add a very brief autobiographical note: I attempted to improve the literacy rate at a small country school. As an English teacher I was right in the firing line - and I did not fear being out there. But I had too much flack from behind; my principal started sniping at me from the rear.
The result of all this was that I wasn’t even given the opportunity of slinking into the library service, away from all the classroom action.
I was tried, convicted and sentenced: “an incompetent teacher”.
I am now in my third year as school bus driver and being the disciplinarian I am, I am proud of the fact that my bus is a safe run because on this bus I have students who do not:
1. Shout, fight, spit and swear.
2. Throw objects around the bus or out the windows.
3. Fondle on the back seat.
Above all, the students don’t like me that much because they feel restricted. They just cannot do as they please. Anyone who transgresses is given a warning, then without hesitation put off the bus.
This is the only measure a bus driver has at his disposal to ensure discipline but it is more what a teacher usually dares do.
The above account may sound terribly authoritarian - but it is not.
As a parent I am myself terribly conscious of the demands made by growing children and I firmly believe that most parents worry about this growing process.
I know that it is a never ending business correcting and guiding and supporting my child through this growing process.
But I have reached the conclusion that particularly the Victorian Government school system is developing policies that are philosophically well-intentioned but which have a negative practical effect.
It is unrealistic to “let children determine their own learning pace”.
If I am honest about my own schooling, then I thank the teachers who bothered to push me along. I was never ready to start writing a story.
As a farmer’s son I would rather be doing something than be writing about it.
Still, the strap taught me to be respectful to those teachers who were dedicated to their subject and students.
Fredrick Toben

Goroke
February 16.

My problems with Bruce Wilson and some members of his staff certainly began in 1980, after my return from Zimbabwe, then Rhodesia. Two months after my one-day emergency teaching stint at the school the following letter, printed in *The Bulletin* on 19 August 1980, created consternation among those teachers who were preparing themselves for the Labor Party take-over - something that happened in 1983.

Socialistic evils

The pictorial review of "the other Russia" (B. July 15) appears to me as a cheap propaganda stunt which misses the point. A brief visit to Russia in 1972 yielded similar impressions. But the social messiness depicted in your article is not a product of, nor monopolised by, socialistic countries. I could quite easily assemble such an expose of poverty and intimidation from almost any western country.

Your article misses the point at stake by relying upon such reporting. Material comfort, or lack thereof, is no argument supporting our western democratic life-style, although its importance must not be underrated.

The Olympic issue appeared to me to be drifting along such suspect lines of argument.

The controversial TV interview with Mr Hawke highlights this trend dramatically. When the interviewer was about to ask a related question (to my mind the most crucial question - that of personal freedom, as guaranteed by a Bill of Rights, and democracy) Bob Hawke became quite excited because he could feel the interviewer grabbing him by the scruff of his deceptive neck. Hawke's only escape was via that emotional gush of personal indignation - and age-old formula in rhetoric which guarantees temporary victory.

The interviewer could have nailed Hawke quite easily on the basic issue by insisting he answer the following questions:

1. Why is there a Berlin Wall; and
2. Why must Russia import foodstuffs from the West.

That after so many years of socialism certain "prison rules" have been softened and some basic material comforts have been gained is not disputed. What I contend here is the evil inherent in the socialistic system. It encourages naïve do-gooders to propagate the idealistic, non-realisable virtues of the socialistic system. Such misguided persons fail to broadcast the fact that once in power they will force others to believe in the virtues of socialism, even if the facts speak against them. Persuasion will of necessity give way to force.

That the western-styled democracies have some horrible blemishes has never been denied. After all, these faults are there for all to see and to criticise.

What astounds me is that so-called critics of our imperfect social and economic system fail to point out that corrections and improvements occur at a more rapid pace and with more perfection than in derivative communist countries.

The whole argument, which apologises for the imperfections in socialistic-communist systems, is reminiscent of those arguments that lament the poverty of African nations. When an opponent of the above view points to South African and Rhodesian (now Zimbabwe) prosperity he is immediately branded as a fascist, racist, etc.

Perhaps the Australian pilots who recently threatened strike action are doing the most to clarify these problems. Should a reduction in air fares be achieved, then Mr Average may be able to visit these countries and judge for himself whether our system requires radical change.

G F Toben
Edenhope

A final matter concerning Bruce Wilson's stewardship of the Edenhope school revealed itself in the *Mail-Times* on 23 November 1992. In a front-page article about education cuts and how it would effect Wimmera schools, a reporter asked the various principals how this would impact upon their schools. This is what was written under Edenhope:

"Edenhope Secondary College principal **Bruce Wilson** said he refused to comment while the Mail-Times 'continued to support a teacher at Goroke who had been sacked'. He hung up."

When I read this I saw the opportunity which editor Maurice Lawson had offered me. I wrote a letter to Wilson threatening him with legal action if he did not publicly apologise for saying those words. Begrudgingly he did in the only way he could - by again lying his head off. On 18 December 1992, on the front page, the following article appeared:

Principal: No, I didn't say that!

A Wimmera college principal says he faces a threat of legal action over a story in the Mail-Times, November 23.

Edenhope Secondary College principal Bruce Wilson has written to the Mail-Times to say that words in the story were incorrectly attributed to him.

The Mail-Times surveyed Wimmera secondary schools last month to find out how State Government education cuts had affected staff levels.

The Mail-Times phoned 12 schools, including Edenhope, and Horsham School Support Centre, seeking information.

The resulting story, November 23, included this paragraph:

"Edenhope Secondary College principal Bruce Wilson said he refused to comment while the Mail-Times 'continued to support a teacher at Goroke who had been sacked'. He hung up."
Mr Wilson has now written this letter to the Editor:
Sir,- You will not be surprised that the words you incorrectly attributed to me in your newspaper, November 23, have upset Dr Fredrick Toben to the extent he has threatened me with legal action.
I have been very busy with school-related matters since then, and have only just had time to write to you.
I wish to make the following points:
* On numerous occasions in recent years I have arranged for Press releases to be forwarded to your newspaper and I have greatly appreciated the articles on our school which have resulted.
* I am in no way interested in opening old wounds, now was I interested in becoming embroiled in a saga involving the termination of Dr Toben's employment at the time when it was current news.
Clearly, your reporter was mistaken when she reported that I would not speak with you, and that this was somehow related to Dr Toben.
A fault in the telephone system was possibly responsible for the cessation of our conversation. I did not hang up, and your reporter made no attempt to reconnect unless she was unable to because of the fault.
I ask that you consider printing this letter so that Dr Toben is aware that I have no concern about your editorial policy.
Bruce Wilson
principal, Edenhope Secondary College.
* The Mail-Times stands by its report. After the story appeared, Mr Wilson complained to the Editor by phone. Questioned on specific points, he would neither confirm nor deny having made the statement attributed to him - Editor.

In my booklet, *Political Correctness in Our Schools*, at p. 66, I make the following point about Bruce Wilson:

"Another education gangster in the area was Mr Bruce Wilson, principal for over a decade at Edenhope College from where I graduated in 1962. He was known as a common thief of firewood and school canteen mars bars!"

Legal Corruption - misleading/shifting ground/telling untruths

My persistent claim that the formal hearing in Dr Curry's office of 7 January 1985 was an example of pure corruption has been challenged by those who claimed that I am overstating the matter because it rests on a "mere technicality".
I think not!
The defence offered by the Department in the County Court specifically stated that I had been given natural justice before being dismissed. In the defendant's interrogatories, No. 8, it stated:

"The Plaintiff was provided with the opportunity to respond to those allegations and in fact did so."

This defence rested on legal officer Ken Dear's "contemporaneous record of the discussion between the Director General of Education and the Plaintiff on 7th January 1985".

My counsel of one year, Mr Tim Ginane, thus jumped off the case, just a few weeks before the trial was scheduled to begin on 9 December 1988. He had a reputation to protect and to fight a case that had no chance of succeeding was not to his liking.
Fortunately we found another counsel, a young and hungry Gerard Maguire whose "win some, lose some" attitude was refreshing. He listened to the micro-cassette recording I had made of that meeting and concluded, "Your case has got stumps. We might get legs yet and get it up and running. We'll have to transcribe the tape."
Judge Strong alleged that Dr Norman Curry "shifted ground" when he realized that he had not given me a hearing on the allegations of incompetence. Shown the Agreement extract concerning the powers of the enquiry - which states quite specifically that its role is fact-finding and not judgmental. Curry shrugged his shoulders and replied, "Nowhere does it say that it can't give advice".

Rightly so. Gratuitous advice can be given but not according to the Agreement, and honourable people stick to their agreements. Judge Strong accepted Curry's evidence and thus found that I had received natural justice on the allegations of incompetence.
My concern has always been Curry's dishonesty. If this corruption comes from the head of the largest education bureaucracy in the state, then how corrupt are its paths leading to the head?

The fact that the defence was focused on the Agreement and that legal officer Dear's written record was not used at the trial, indicates that the "shifting ground" was strategically thought-through.
I now wonder how many teachers have had their careers snuffed in like fashion.

If we recall how the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials used the 'anything goes' approach to get that essential conviction, then this education bureaucracy was close behind. It has led me to comment that I would rather deal with a gangster organisation than a corrupt bureaucracy because the former at least is honest in its business while the latter makes claims to virtues it simply doesn't possess.

Things happened differently when in 1919, owing to a number of teachers' enquiries, the Department defined the meaning of 'outstanding educational and social service in the community' thus:

Outstanding educational service implies the possession by the teacher of a broad educational outlook, of enthusiasm, and of a measure of imagination that enable him to recognise the real aims of education and the big problems of the school, and inspire him to attempt the realization of the one to devise means for solutions of the other.

Isaac Isaacs, Australia's first Jewish native-born Governor General, while a teacher, clashed with his principal who had accused Isaacs of "insubordination and failure to co-operate". Isaacs successfully refuted the charges but was transferred to another school while his principal was censured.
Isaacs concludes his letter thus:

I appeal, Sir, to your sense of justice either to totally exonerate me from the false charge brought against me by Mr Harris, or to allow me, through an investigation by some impartial tribunal the opportunity of freeing my name from the imputation so wrongfully and undeservedly cast upon it. I trust that you will not blame me if I cannot silently permit my character to be slurred, my proper obedience and respect to be impugned by allowing such a blot to rest upon me through the false representations of Mr Harris, even though he be my superior.
I have the honor to be,
Sir,
Your most obedient Servant,
Isaac A Isaacs.

Why did no-one rescue me? Why did Justice Harper's 'buddy' Paul Bravender-Coyle, my advising counsel, advise me not to call witnesses Peter Ford and Andrew Brideson who would have broken the nexus between the union and bureaucracy thereby exposing the corruption that held the relationship together as I was being 'done in' by them?
I recall how on 1 February 1989 Laurie Oliver featured my County Court victory in no uncertain tone in his newspaper, the *Kowree Advocate*. Some of my grass-root supporters didn't care to knock over establishment figures at the local level but Oliver was a seasoned newspaper man from Adelaide who "didn't give a stuff about being liked or disliked." Oliver was a courageous man who did not shy away from speaking his mind - something that is so sadly missing among public figures to this day. Let me not remind you that my own case signalled to other teachers they had better shut up or face the consequence of 'being done in'.
Here is what Laurie Oliver wrote:

The Toben Saga: Natural Justice?
So Dr Fredrick Toben has finally been adjudged wrongfully dismissed - four years after any open-minded person could see there was a denial of natural justice in his case.
The sacked Goroke school teacher was charged with incompetence and disobedience, and dismissed without being allowed to answer the charges.
Judge Strong's announcement in last Friday's County Court in Melbourne have since been well chronicled by the national media - but where were these vultures of society when their help was pleaded for over the four years of Dr Toben's denigration?
Only our regional Wimmera Mail-Times can hold its head high for giving a good and fair coverage to his plight.
Certainly after a belated run of the story by The Bulletin, one or two others showed brief interest, but generally his plight was ignored - perhaps not sensational enough, or perhaps because he was in a small country town he did not exist?
Fredrick Toben's 'natural justice' may yet be too late - four years of being branded, and his persistent fight against that, has cost him dearly and it remains to be seen whether those responsible admit their actions were wrong and return him his profession and livelihood.

Freedom of Information

The Labor Government gleefully introduced the Freedom of Information Act in order to open up bureaucratic structures. This is what lies behind the push to have administrators play and open game where reasons for decisions are given. Only in this way are the underpinning thought processes of bureaucratic decisions made accessible to outsiders.
It's the old accountability-legitimacy argument which finally reached Australia from Europe just a decade later.

I was fortunate in that the acting manager of the Department's FoI section took his job seriously and honestly. He handed over my personnel file almost intact, except for some name deletions safeguarding those who had defamed me in the enquiry report. This was in August 1985 and by June 1992 the permanent manager had closed most files for obvious reasons.
The only way of overcoming this renewed closure of files is to take legal action. Then, during the exchange of documents phase of the case, nothing on the file can be withheld. However, legal action is prohibitively expensive - and so ordinary citizens continue to suffer their bureaucratically inflicted injustices without any remedy at all. This is psychologically debilitating - and it is little wonder that many then self-destruct. Naturally that is exactly what the corrupt officials wish you to do.

In my exchange of documents for the County Court case I had the strange situation where the Department's solicitor requested copies of my earlier received FoI documents. Why? Before the court case my personnel file had been 'sanitised' and most crucial documents had disappeared from it.

Without expecting any cooperation from the new FoI manager, Nancy Hawkins, on 24 February 1992 I sent her the following letter:

Dear Miss Hawkins
Thank you for your letter of 11 February wherein you draw my attention to the requirements needing fulfilment before my request can be acted upon.
Each request assumes that a search will be made in one or all of the files - general, leave, discipline - so that the following information can be obtained:
1. Any reference to any disciplinary procedures enacted against the person so named;
2. Any leave requested, whether granted or not, and any other pertinent matter;
3. Complaints received by the Ministry of Education, through principals, parents, students or any opther source about the person's teaching methods or any other matter;
4. In particular:

Raymond McCraw - his failure to gain the vice-principalship at Timboon Consolidated School before 1982.
David Hatherell - his 1983 request for leave (Frank Peck). His 'demotion' by McCraw as vice-principal of Goroke.
Dennis Bolster - now manager Central Highland Wimmera Region prior to 1983 involved in disciplinary matter but survived.

Russell Wicking - prior to 1984 primary teaching in Westerns Victoria.
Jim Clelland - assistant Regional Director, Central Highlands Wimmera Region, until his death in July 1985.
John Nunn - 1984 SEO, C-H-W Region, now retired.
Des Lockhart - Staffing officer who oversaw permanency placements - retired about three years ago.
Irene Wescott - Senior Welfare Officer 1984.
Frank Peck - in particular my call to his office end 1983, and the Hatherell request for leave without pay, December 1983.
Jim Betson - in particular his 1983 appointment as DPIR.
Steve Macpherson - in particular his handling of Sophie Johnson's matter in 1987. She was sent to the Correspondence School.
Ken Boston - since 1983 Regional Director CHWR.
Norman Curry - Director General until November 1985. His report made at my formal hearing on 7 January 1985. [He never made a report as claimed].
Peter Schmidt - 1982 St Arnaud High School - resigned from system 1991.
Peter Martin - Kaniva High School principal.
Chris Ekinsmyth - Dimboola Secondary College principal.
Maxwell Thomkins - foundation principal Kings Park Secondary College - in particular the Phil Langford and Peter Arbusof affairs.
Teachers at Goroke 1983-4: Mark Weegberg, Robert Ferlazzo, Karen Reid, Bruce Heggie, John Bell, Val Bull, Geoffrey French, Anna McCraw, Joan Oliver, Audrey McLean, Glenn Duncan, Jess Batson.
Brian Brasier & Frank O'Dea - 1982 St Arnaud High School.
Bruce Wilson - principal of Edenhope Secondary College.
George Drossinos and Ken Dear - legal officers within the Ministry of Education.
John Patterson - principal of Goroke P-12 College - in particular July 1987 when my matter was being aired in the local media.
Rosalie Hood - Senior Welfare Officer.
Glenn McBurney & Garth Lampe - GM and RMD.

It is of course self evident that any documentation on these files, which specifically deals with my person, is also included in this request.
I thank you for your cooperation in this matter.
Sincerely
Fredrick Toben

I never received a reply from Miss Hawkins, and by this time I could not pursue her in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal because I was too busy preparing my defamation actions against McCraw, Boston, Wicking, Martin and Ekinsmyth, and Bell.

Moral support and hitting the establishment brickwall

A liar must, of necessity, fear truth, and fear those who tell the truth because truth has an uncanny habit of slipping into view when most unexpected. Such musings bring to the fore the importance of trust. Where there is no trust it is not possible to form healthy relationships. Lying corrupts the foundations of our society because relationships fall apart and society's fabric disintegrates - to be replaced by an all-embracing web of control. Individuals become sceptical and cynical, then flee into hedonistic nihilism. What matters is sense gratification - and bugger anyone but myself. The me-generation's legacy is with us as be reach the year 2000.

When Ken Boston stated publicly that I had refused the help offered to me by the support group, he was lying - and he knew he was lying. As early as 1983 I had made use of resources that would assist my performance in the classroom.
On 28 April 1983 I wrote a letter to Mr Richard McRoberts, the English consultant at the Ballarat Regional Education Office, Hopetoun Street, Ballarat. I requested some material for my English room because Margaret O"Neil at the Media Sales Department of the Department of Education could not help me.
Besides sending me an English report, McRoberts did not help me at all, just like Dennis Bolster's failure to assist me when I cried for help. McRoberts penned the following note:

Dear Fredrick
Please accept my apologies for the delay in sending this [report]. I've been flat out and your request got put aside.
Sorry. And best wishes.
Richard.

When I most needed help from the Department it wasn't forthcoming The support group was an execution group programmed to railroad me at the local level.
My local Member of Parliament, Bill McGrath, did not really do anything while in opposition - and nothing as the Liberals assumed power in 1993.
Interestingly, one of the rare persons who actually did bother to nudge the Minister for Education was Labor MP Race Mathews. On 17 July 1991 he wrote a letter to the Minister, The Hon Barry Pullen:

My Dear Minister
I was deeply disturbed by the articles on Mr Fredrick Toben which appeared in the *Australian* on 18 April and the *Herald Sun* on 15 May.
After making all due allowance for the hostility of both papers to the government and its education philosophy and policies, there remains aspects of the whole matter which seem to me to need to be answered.
I will be grateful if you will interest yourself personally in that the whole matter is vigorously and impartially sifted, and let me have the benefit of your conclusions at an early date.
Yours sincerely
Race Mathews
Member for Oakleigh

Although nothing eventuated I was comforted by such letter because it transcended party lines.

The Hon Alan Hunt, M.L.C., informed me how he once had to undo a wrong decision involving 17 up-line bureaucrats. Once a person has been stitched up it is very difficult, expensive and time-consuming to unravel the stitching.
Perhaps this is why Hunt was the only politician who bothered to pursue my case with any seriousness. On 21 May 1991 he wrote the following letter to me:

Dear Mr Toben
I acknowledge your letter of the 20th instant enclosing two press articles, one of which I had previously read.
You wrote to me enclosing supporting documentation on 31 July last year. After studying the documentation I did become concerned at the possibility that an injustice had been done, and that there had been a reluctance at the official level even to acknowledge that such a possibility existed.
On 13 August last year I therefore wrote a personal letter to the former Director-General of Education, Dr Norman Curry, for whom I have considerable respect. I have however received no response - or even acknowledgement - perhaps on legal advice! In view of the lack of response I now feel at liberty to release a copy of that letter to you.
Today I have telephoned the office of the present Minister and advised that in view of the doubts which clearly exist, the case should be re-opened and a fresh enquiry made. I have emphasised that this enquiry should desirably be chaired by an educationist who is independent of the Department. I understand the Minister will be phoning me about the matter.
To avoid the slightest possibility of any misunderstanding between us, I have not come to the personal conclusion either that you should be re-employed, or that you should not. On the basis of the information and documentation you have placed before me I cannot, however, be sure that you have been fairly treated, and I am satisfied that a further investigation is warranted.
Yours sincerely
Alan Hunt, M.L.C.
Enc.
cc. The Hon Barry Pullen, MLC, Minister for Education & Training.
Mr Norman Geschke, OBE, Ombudsman.
Dr Norman Curry.

This is his letter to Dr Curry dated 13 August 1990.

Dear Norman
I enclose sheaf of correspondence to hand from Fredrick Toben of Goroke, whose case I am sure you are very familiar with.
I have brushed his correspondence aside in the belief that he had a persecution complex, but on reading his latest heartfelt epistle and the material which accompanies it I have a nagging fear that everyone concerned may have formed a similar view and similarly brushed him aside without really delving to see whether or not an injustice may have been done.
In your shoes, I have little doubt that I would have automatically upheld the finding of what I would have believed was an independent inquiry into his conduct, and I want to make it plain that I am in no way whatever criticising your role in the issue.
Knowing your total honesty and integrity what I want to know is whether you personally now believe that you may have too readily accepted the results of that inquiry. Did Toben have any real opportunity of rebutting the charges of incompetence when he appeared before you, or had that issue already been foreclosed in your mind by the inquiry? Are you still satisfied

that he was unfit as a teacher, or do you now have a nagging doubt that he may perhaps have been railroaded unfairly at the local level?
Following the careful reading of the present and previous documents put before me I cannot be sure that he was fairly treated at the local level, unless you can provide me with some reassurance.
I am doing nothing at this stage tot ake the case further and whether or not I do will be heavily influenced by any comments you make, for you know that I do respect your judgement.
Kindest regards.
Yours sincerely
Alan Hunt, M.L.C.

I received Mr Hunt's letter on Monday 27 May 1991, and I was ready to publicise it to the local media because it was a newsworthy item that he had called for a new enquiry into my dismissal.
Unfortunately another news item overshadowed my moves and the next day's editorial in *The Age* captured its essence, and therefore any hope I had of rehabilitation outside of the legal system.

Alan Hunt: man about the house
It is sad and strange that the Liberal Party preselection sword has cut down the President of the Legislative Council, mr Alan Hunt. Mr Hunt, 63 , is one of the most experienced and able state Liberal veterans, and a staunch defender of the Parliament and its institutional values and conventions. The timing of his surprise preselection defeat on Sunday is unfortunate for both the Parliament and the Liberal Party. The Parliament will lose a champion just as it is tackling the far-reaching issues raised in a report on parliamentary reform commissioned by Mr Hunt and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Dr Ken Coghill. The parliamentary Liberal Party will lose a wise counsel whose advice and example would have been invaluable to the new and inexperienced Liberal MPs who seem likely to flood State Parliament after the next election.
There is no evidence that Mr Hunt was the victim of an internal plot engineered at state Liberal headquarters. Nor does Mr Hunt's blood appear to be on the hands of the Liberal leader, Mr Kennett, although there have been disagreements between them. But it is undeniable that the defeat of Alan Hunt stifles a force for moderation and restraint in Liberal parliamentary ranks at a time when Mr Kennett is toying with extreme measures, including possibly the blocking of supply, in his efforts to force an election. Alan Hunt, on his record, would find it difficult to support some tactics being entertained by Mr Kennett. His abiding interest is "Parliament, not government from party perspectives". He believes "the Constitution of the state belongs to the people…It is far too important to be treated as the plaything of the moment." Alan Hunt is also prepared to place his conscience ahead of party diktat, as he did in 1988 when he abstained from voting to save the Cain Government's death-with-dignity legislation. Clearly, he does not fit in the rigid New Right ideological mould into which the state Liberal hierarchy apparently wants to force state and federal MPs.
It is a measure of Alan Hunt's quality that he accepted defeat equably and without recrimination. Mr Kennett offered only cursory regrets, declaring that preselections were tough and competitive. He might, with justice, have added that the ruthless Liberal Party renovation and rebuilding process, which has destroyed other state and federal parliamentarians, is a necessary preparation for a return to power. But the process is either cutting a needlessly wide swathe or is based on a dangerously narrow view of Liberal ideology when it takes out men like Alan Hunt. He was not "dead wood", and his departure after 30 distinguished years will diminish the Parliament that he defended so vigorously.

Later, Alan Hunt said to me, "You have hit the establishment brickwall".

I asked, "Who would be there to help me knock a hole in it to effect my rehabiliation as a teacher?

He responded, "No-one."

"Including the judiciary?" I asked.

"Including the judiciary", he responded.

I didn't want to believe him but Alan Hunt was right, and he retired from politics after the 3 October 1992 state election. My defamation actions failed in the Supreme Court as did my appeal. On the day in May 1993 when Australia was being treated to a public video screening of David Irving's *The Search For Truth In History*, I battled it out before Justice David Harper, the 'old boy and house captain of Melbourne Grammar School'. Although I failed in this battle, I emerged a stronger person because I can rest easy knowing that Harper is a corrupt judge.

Interestingly, those who vehemently claim there is no such thing as a conspiracy, those who label others as ‘conspiracy freaks’, will claim it is coincidental that Alan Hunt lost his preselection just as he had written to me the letter announcing his intention to call for an enquiry into my dismissal. If it is a coincidence, then bless Mr Hunt’s soul because he is a man I respect.

I think it was Sir Walter Crocker who, at 96, said to me that there is no such thing as a coincidence because every human action contains its own logical structure which vies for our attention. Any human activity is thus propelled by some person - and if a group gets together and works out a plan to thwart a quest for justice, then that is proof of a conspiracy.

Didn’t I show that the Victorian education bureaucracy and the teachers’ union worked together? What do you make of the fact that Jim Betson asked Russell Wicking to come to his office and look at my personnel file? That’s a breach of confidentiality. Russell Wicking denied in court that Irene Wescott ever telephoned him on this matter. Wicking is a classic liar - and during proceedings he was not asked to give his physical address to the court. Why not? Harper had taken over the examination of the witness! Need I say more?

END

Postscript:

The manuscript of this book, except for the Epilogue, was completed in its basic form before the 1988 County Court case. It has lain dormant for a number of years - until March 1998 when I sensed the time had come to turn it into a book.

The fact that I am before the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission - on account of Adelaide Institute's website deemed to be a racist hate site by Jeremy Jones of the Executive Council Of Australian Jewry - has also prompted me to get the job done. The procedure used by the HREOC is almost a carbon copy of that used by the Victorian Education Department to get me out of its system. Natural justice and truth-content is irrelevant before the commission. I specifically asked Commissioner Kathleen McEvoy whether truth is relevant. She merely quoted the Racial Hatred Act wherein only the feeling of hurt needs to be established in order to determine the case. I have thus formally withdrawn from such immoral proceedings - something I should have done when McCraw initiated the Support group and the enquiry. In the HREOC case one wonders what aims are being pursued if the mechanism of elimination is so strikingly similar to that of the Support Group and the Enquiry procedures. We shall know in time.

Afterward by Ronald Conway

The tragic-ironic odyssey of Dr Fredrick Toben is profoundly instructive for those readers who have had the patience and the wit to learn from it. Some general warnings from his case present themselves all too obviously. The first is 'put not your trust in bureaucracies and those who prosper from their manipulations'. A second might be that, in a society where politics or economic self interest increasingly overrides ethics, it behoves all honest folk to watch their backs! The third might be that in the words of T. S. Eliot: "We cannot bear too much reality". The recurrent phenomenon of Special interest groups preferring to shoot the messenger rather than ponder the truth of his message has become so commonplace in Australia that almost all our media sources have become tainted by it. This dismaying lesson alone shows the lengths that even ordinary well-meaning and customarily peaceable people in public life will go to avoid confessing that they have been implicated in an injustice and been parties to a lie. One adverts to the familiar aphorism of William Penn: "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing".

Dr Toben's almost fantastic contest over several years with the Victorian Education Department testifies to how what began as a simple case of dislike and prejudice held against a staff member by a country primary school principal on the flimsiest of grounds accumulated such force that it could wreck a career, break up a family unit, divide a local community and ultimately reach as high as the full bench of the Victorian Supreme Court. Even after having astonishingly won his case before the Court as a virtually penniless advocate on his behalf, Fredrick Toben was still denied a return to the teaching vocation he loved. He was finally crushed with an obscure bureaucratic technicality which reached beyond natural justice itself. He had dared to take on 'the system'. The pillars of the system could not afford, in their own view, to lose face. Ordinary decency itself had been somehow lost in a power struggle where the fate of one hapless teacher was treated as expendable.

As a backdrop to Dr Toben's luckless professional life lies the larger picture of the progressive lunacies which virtually took over Victorian government schools (especially secondary schools) throughout the nineteen seventies and eighties. Naked ideology gradually supplanted a neutral style of pedagogy to the point where successive Education ministries ceased to be servants of the public and became either willing or unwilling creatures of a dominant Left-wing power group within the Victorian teachers unions.

An admittedly imperfect system of visiting inspectors which one held teachers and principals broadly accountable for their principles and practices had been abolished, leaving 'innovative' teachers to conduct themselves largely as they pleased. So-called 'peer-review' among school staffs reigned supreme while any form of external evaluation or assessment was treated with an increasingly paranoid hostility. Schools (as it is still claimed in some centres of teacher training) were to be mainly 'agents of social change'. It was argued that the old 'authoritarian' conformities of the ordered classroom only retarded youngsters as proper critics of the prevailing capitalist-consumer culture.

Somehow in this heady climate of secondary education perceived as a means of populist social subversion, effective rigour in teaching method and a proper respect for the objective content of knowledge itself tended to be regarded as of ever-diminishing importance. It was this kind of modish new outlook which would inevitably throw teachers like Dr Fredrick Toben into a kind of innocent prominence. Almost naively conscientious teachers of his sort insisted that the basic disciplines of English, Mathematics, Science, geography and History (collapsed lately into a mess called Social Studies) could not be imparted by osmosis or hit-and-miss student impressionism. They knew that while the student mainstream at the class mean might somehow 'muddle through' by 'discovery'

methods in teaching, both the under-achiever and the gifted child needed formal teacher help if they were not to arrive at Year 12 either semi-literate or suffocated by mediocrity. The Tobens of the government system were an embarrassment by the very fact of showing up some of the fallacies of the new order. Hence truth could be simply turned on its head and 'competence' could be characterised as 'incompetence' in conformity with the political correctness of the time.

One must not be too harsh on the teacher reformers of the seventies. They did much to humanise the classroom and remove many of the punitive teaching approaches of the pre-1960 era. Friendlier more 'democratic' approaches assuredly made most students more comfortable. But what the teacher crusaders of the new order ignored was that the children of dysfunctional, semi-literate even delinquent parents frequently had no respect for a school system without discipline or ultimate sanctions. Here the welfare of teachers would count for little while students more in need of psychiatry, counselling or social correction could blackmail their ineffectual instructors into hand-wringing or tolerating their unhappy bloody-mindedness.

Today the consequences of yesterday's triumph of feel-good educational ideology over a common sense appraisal of human nature are apparent to all observant citizens. Well-functioning government secondary schools - taking as they must all student comers - are still in evidence but increasingly as islands of sanity in a sea of child-minding institutions where care-worn teachers merely struggle through the day as victims of the very union bureaucrats who remain a part-source of their problems. Even amid the penny-pinching of the Kennett years in Victoria, the vital issues have never been related to class size or school funding, but about mounting a serious attack on a school system which no longer works because it is based upon a bankrupt academic visions of teachers redeeming society while tamely accepting social burdens beyond their training and capacities.

At times like these many government-school teachers aged over 40 might spare some regret for Fredrick Toben who was one of the most notable casualties in a teaching body which allowed itself to be duped by its own luminaries and is now paying the price for its twenty years of gullibility. Perhaps it is not too late to rescue Dr Toben's reputation by finally recognising that competent, well-informed teaching professionals who refuse to play parent substitutes or therapists alone can make the first steps back to educational sanity.

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